Sorrowing not without Hope

For those Sleeping in Jesus

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SORROWING

NOT WITHOUT HOPE

For those sleeping in Jesus

BY THE

REV. CORNELIUS WALKER, D.D.

SECOND EDITION

NEW YORK

THOMAS WHITTAKER

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PREFACE.

THE subject-matter of this little volume has its interest to all classes of thoughtful readers. Such interest, however, thus common to all, is peculiar to one class, — the Christian mourner at the grave, or in the remembrance of those who "in Christ have fallen asleep." Blessed are they that thus mourn, for they shall be comforted. Even in their mourning there is comfort, — the precious assurance that with those who have gone it is well: the blessed hope to those who remain of heavenly reunion. With "this comfort wherewith they are comforted of God" they should render themselves familiar, and in it find their abundant consolation. So far, too, as opportunity is afforded, should they extend and impart this consolation to others.

CONTENTS.

I. PAGE

"SORROW NOT WITHOUT HOPE" 7

II.

THE WORD OF DIVINE CONSOLATION . . . 28

III.

THE REST OF GOD'S PEOPLE 49

IV.

JESUS THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE, 67

V.

JESUS THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE, 84

VI.

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THOSE WHO DIE IN THE LORD 102

VII.

THE DIVINE TRAINING AND DISCIPLINE . 126

"THOUGH some whose presence once
Sweet comfort round me shed,
Here in the body walk no more
The way that I must tread,
Not they, but what they were,
Went to the house of fear;
They were the incorruptible;
They left corruption here.

Thank God for all my loved,
That out of pain and care
Have safely reached the heavenly heights,
And stay to meet me there!
Not these I mourn, — I know
By faith their joys sublime, —
But for myself that still below
Must wait my appointed time."

SORROWING NOT WITHOUT HOPE.

I.

"SORROW NOT WITHOUT HOPE."

"*I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him.*" — 1 THESS. iv. 13, 14.

THE occasion of this language seems to have been a certain erroneous impression, prevalent among the Thessalonian believers, in reference to the second coming of Christ, — that second visible coming of the Son of man, of which the apostles had received assurance on the day of His ascension. The exact time of this event had not been revealed: and as there was a promised coming of the Master to His faithful servants in the hour of their departure; as there was, moreover, a coming of this Master, not far

distant, for judgment upon His apostate people, — these different comings became confounded together, or were regarded as identical. In some cases, perhaps, there was the expectation of a second visible coming of the Lord Jesus, very near at hand, for the setting up of an earthly dominion; to give the kingdom to the spiritual Israel; to confer upon His people great earthly blessing and prosperity. Others, again, recognizing more fully the spiritual character of this kingdom, and the real nature of these blessings, were led to identify their reception and enjoyment with the actual fact of the Master's second coming, and as dependent upon it for their realization. The inquiry thus arose, whether those who had already died, and those who would die prior to this event of triumph and blessing, could have any share in it; still further, to the more anxious inquiry, what would become of these departed ones, — how it would be with them, whether or not they had perished entirely? Many of these early disciples, we must remember, were converts from the imperfect light of Judaism, from the gross darkness of heathenism. Christian truths, with which we have been familiar from childhood, they were just beginning,

and in many cases very imperfectly, to see and understand. We must, therefore, not be at all surprised at these their difficulties and misapprehensions, even though they were apostolic converts, and had received apostolic instruction.

To remove such difficulties and misapprehensions was the design of this language. Those to whom the apostle is writing, are told that those who have fallen asleep in Christ, are with Christ; that when Christ comes, God will bring with Him all of His servants who shall die prior to that event; that there will be no pre-eminence to those who shall then be living; that after they that have slept in Christ are awakened, and they that are alive at His coming are changed, they shall then, both alike, the changed living and the revivified dead, be caught up in the air to the Lord, to be with Him and with each other forever. In view of these truths, they are told to comfort one another; to console themselves with this Divine assurance of their blissful and endless re-union with their ascended Lord and with their departed friends and brethren. "Wherefore, comfort one another with these words."

But while thus primarily made use of to re-

move existing errors, this language is no less instructive or of interest, in its material and for others; for all classes of hearers or readers of the Divine Word. The truths which it reveals are truths for every age of the Church and for every class of Christian believers. Properly received, they are to all suggestive of profitable improvement, of abundant consolation, especially to those in the experience of bereavement and its sorrow over friends or relatives sleeping in the Lord Jesus. To some of these truths, as thus brought before us, we may, therefore, profitably give our attention. In laying them to heart, and dwelling upon them, we attain their Divinely intended purpose: "with these words comfort ourselves."

In so doing, we first notice the class spoken of, and the form of expression in which they are described, — departed believers, "sleeping in Jesus," "the dead in Christ." The text thus manifestly has reference, not to all, but to one class of the dead; those who, in virtue of their connection with a living Saviour, shall enjoy a blessed resurrection. They are spoken of as asleep; although dead, yet as "in Christ."

This form of expression implies that they are not, like others, without hope or prospect of a blessed awakening. They are not hopelessly dead, but in a state of blessed slumber. "They are asleep," not, indeed, as to the spirit which is with Christ, which, "absent from the body, is at home with the Lord," but as to their bodily powers and activities. The redeemed spirit, departing from its bodily companion, is even now wakingly present with its ascended and living Lord. And the body, consigned to its earthly resting-place, is slumbering in sweet and safe repose for the awakening of the resurrection. The body of Jesus Himself thus slept for a brief season in an earthly sepulchre. The bodies of His people for a brief season are in a like state of blessed slumber. More than once do we find this expression made use of in reference to the children of God departed from this world. And it is well worthy of note, that, with one doubtful exception,[1] it is never in the New Testament applied to others. The dying Stephen "kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell

[1] 2 Pet. iii. 4.

asleep." "Some," said the apostle, speaking of those who had testified of the resurrection, "some remain at this present, but some have fallen asleep." If Christ be not raised, they that have fallen asleep in Him have perished. To use the language of Jesus Himself, with reference to Lazarus, these departed ones are not hopelessly dead, they are asleep. Their slumber shall know of an awakening. It is the sweet sleep of the laboring man, life's toils being ended; that blessed slumber of the worn and wearied bodily frame, which prepares it for new and future employment, — the endless activities, the blessed rewards, the perfect enjoyments, of a heavenly existence.

And as there is this great difference from the children of this world, with those "who sleep in Jesus," "who die in the Lord," so must there be a difference in our feelings when they are taken away from us, or when we think of them in sorrowful remembrance. "We are not to sorrow as do others which have no hope." Natural feeling called forth in the departure of our loved ones, or as the remembrance of them comes up to our minds and hearts, must be sanctified, — must be restrained and moderated.

"I would not have you to be ignorant in regard to these departed ones. I would give you instruction as to their present safety and future blessedness, that knowing this, and in such knowledge sustained, ye should be consoled, — not sorrow as do others, the children of this world over the children of this world without hope." Notice the peculiar discrimination of this language; its tenderness, and beautiful adaptation to the weakness even of sanctified human capacity. The persons here addressed are not entirely forbidden the expression of grief under the pressure of natural bereavement, or in thinking of those from whom by death they had been separated. They are not told not to sorrow at all, but, in the outpouring of natural feeling, not to do so hopelessly. The gospel of Christ is for man. It is for man as he really is, — in his weakness and imperfection, the child of sin, the inheritor, therefore, of all the infirmities and sorrows and sufferings of which sin is productive. This gospel does not dry up any current of natural affection, blunt any susceptibility of sorrow or of joy with which we are endowed. Its object rather is to elevate and purify every such capacity in its exercise, — to render the child of God more

sympathetic, more Christ-like, more capable of feeling, and, therefore, of relieving, human suffering. That which increases capacity of pure enjoyment in a world like ours, increases capacity of suffering. Were it not for the compensative consolations of Divine grace, Christians, in this increased capacity of suffering, which comes through the purification of natural feeling, would be "of all men most miserable." Even with such divine consolation, the truth is distinctly recognized, that natural grief may have its proper expression. He who, in His compassion, restored a darling child to her bereaved parents; who, in pity to a widowed mother, called back the spirit of an only son; whose own tears were shed at the sepulchre of Bethany, — would not altogether restrain those of His people under similar circumstances. Constituted as is human nature, there is a reality in such experience, that moves painfully, from its lowest depth, the fountain of feeling and affection. Say what we will, let others say what they will, let it be said kindly and wisely and truly, let us recognize as we may its appropriateness and its sympathy, and yet the thought of a life-long absence cannot but create an aching void in any human bosom.

And he is not more, but less, than a man, who would disregard these feelings, or altogether repress them. There is, indeed, comfort for them that mourn. But that such comfort is divinely provided, shows that it is really necessary. The chastisement may, indeed, hereafter bring its peaceable fruits of righteousness. But it must needs be real chastisement to produce such effect, — in its reception is full of grief. The "light affliction, but for a moment," may "work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." But it is affliction still. Though light in comparison with its heavenly results, it is heavy in itself, heavy as compared with other trials to which in this world we are subjected.

And yet, in the heaviest and bitterest, and to the feelings which they call forth, there must be a limit. We are not "to sorrow as do others without hope," — "without hope." There are those without hope, either as to themselves, or as to their departed objects of affection. To these the only relief is that which comes from exhaustion; the weakening of memory, — the displacement of the lost object by others of a more engrossing character. For these there is no

comfort, no hope, — no hopes but those that are delusive. That they should mourn hopelessly, as long as they mourn at all, is but in accordance with the real facts of their condition. The grave may, indeed, be decked with all the tokens and emblems of immortality. The lying epitaph may deceive the stranger, incite the scoff of the bad, and the sigh of the good. The rising shaft may point to a heaven the blissful abode of the children of God. But there is no hope; no hope for that godless man lying in death, no real hope in the bosoms of those who are cheating themselves with such delusion. The light of Heaven does not shine upon that grave. It is the grave of the earthly and sinful. "When a wicked man dieth, his expectations perish." "The wicked, in his wickedness, is driven away."

"But the righteous in his death hath hope;" and the righteous who by such death are in the experience of bereavement and sorrow, also have hope. In such bereavement, and the grief which accompanies, they are not forbidden the expression of natural feeling, but they are forbidden the sorrow of others, — the sorrow of this world. They are not to sorrow hopelessly in their sepa-

ration, — must not forget the blessed hope of a blessed re-union. They are not to sorrow rebelliously, calling in question the Divine propriety of any such dispensation. They are not to sorrow as over an accident, the mere result of human contingency, failure, mistake, sickness, or mortality. They are not to sorrow as if the event which produced their grief were unknown or unprovided for in the counsels of Divine love and wisdom. They are not to sorrow as if the bereavement were necessarily an evil, either to themselves, or to those who are taken. They are not to sorrow as if this chastisement — chastisement though it be — were not from a Father's hand, — were not dictated in tenderest love, as well to the departed as to the survivors. In all these respects, the child of God, by faith in Christ Jesus, must not sorrow as do others. He will be tempted thus to do; and, therefore, he is guarded against it. He will be tempted, first of all, to sorrow despondingly; in that life-long separation, — which, after all, may be only a few days, — to doubt or forget that eternal reunion, to which the longest life is but a moment in comparison. He will be tempted to sorrow rebelliously, — to be asking why this one should

have been taken, rather than others whose loss would have been scarcely felt; why this particular mode of chastisement, rather than any other, should have been selected. He will be tempted to sorrow as over something that might have been avoided by human means, — as something, perhaps, brought about through want of care, skill, or watchfulness; something for which God did not make loving and careful provision; and he will be tempted to sorrow as if the chastisement were evidence of a Father's displeasure, and of nothing but His displeasure. In all these varied forms of temptation and trial, he must stay his soul with Divine consolation. He must remember that God does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men of any class, much less those who are His by filial affection and obedience; that "like as a father pitieth," — not merely loveth, but pitieth, "like as a father" whose love is moved to its deepest and tenderest exercise at the sight of his suffering child, — "even so the Lord pitieth them that love Him." He must bear in mind, that "whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." That Lord knows of every affliction before it comes. He knows it to be

necessary and good. And He provides consolation to sustain His people exposed to it. His language to them is, "Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour." "Be still, and know that I am God." "I am God, in wisdom, in love, as well as in power, in all My dispensations." "Who is among you that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God." Bearing these consolations in mind, the servants of Christ cannot sorrow without hope. They cannot sorrow as do others, the children of this world. They may, indeed, be cast down, but know that they are not forsaken. There is that in the present which sustains, that in the future more than repays for all past and present suffering. Let their "hearts be thus fixed trusting in the Lord," and there will be nothing to fear, either from the past and present, or from that

which may come in the unknown and uncertain future.

And, as the apostle exhorts these bereaved and sorrowing ones to be hopeful, so he gives them special grounds and reasons for this hope. "If," says he, "we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him." This thought, in various forms, is presented and reiterated in the New Testament. To believe intelligently that Christ, the Head of His Church, — that is, of all His believing people, — died and rose again, and is exalted at the right hand of God, involves additionally the resurrection and life of His people. As they are in Christ, they are partakers of Christ, — partakers of Christ not only in His death, but in His resurrection. "Because I live," is His assurance, "ye shall live also." This it is that constitutes the basis of the great argument in the fifteenth chapter of first Corinthians. That Christ has "risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept," or are sleeping in the repose of a blessed death, is urged as proof indisputable that they will rise also. They are in moral and spiritual connection, by faith and love, with Him now, —

are in process of gradual transformation of the whole man to His divine image, and thus in preparation for the enjoyment of His heavenly presence. In a bodily organism, the members live as long as the head discharges its proper functions. On the other hand, the head cannot perfectly discharge these its appropriate functions, cannot healthfully live, while its subordinate members are removed or decaying. So is it with Christ and His people. That He lives, and will live forever, is a divine pledge and assurance that they live and will live also. He is the Vine, they are the branches. As long as the parent trunk sends out its nourishment, and the branches abide in it, those branches live. Christ is the Head, His believing people are the members. He Himself proclaims, that as He is the Resurrection and the Life, so they that believe in Him shall live, though they die ; and that, thus believing and living in Him, they shall not die forever. He tells us elsewhere, that where He is, He would have His disciples be. In that house of His and their Father, where there are many mansions, He has prepared a place for them. These are the reasons, not human, but divine, why the Christian should not sorrow without hope for those

who have fallen asleep in Him, who are resting from their labors, and their works following them. They have, it is true, departed from the eye of sight. But the eye of faith gazes up after them, in spite of the blinding tears of natural affection traces their heavenward course, and sees them with Christ. They are, indeed, absent from the body. But they are at home with the Lord. And we can begin to realize, almost without the express dictate of inspiration, that thus to be at home with Him is "far better:" "far better" for them certainly, "far better" it may be for us — necessary it may be for us, purifying our hearts from the dross even of natural affection, laying up for us treasures in heaven, so that our hearts may there be constantly going. Those who have gone are the redeemed ones of Christ, — redeemed by Him out of the bondage of corruption, from all the powers of earthly temptation, into the blessed freedom of heavenly deliverance. They are with Christ: where Christ is, is heaven, are all the essentials of heavenly blessedness. For ourselves and for others, we may sorrow in view of their departure, but not hopelessly; for the time is not far distant when we shall enjoy a blessed re-union. Until then we know that

with them, all is well. "They are taken from the trouble to come," — from the trouble that always comes, of some kind or other, in earthly experience. "They have entered into peace." "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them."

But there is a special time to which the apostle here calls attention as that in which these anticipations receive complete fulfilment. "If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him." Whatever the blessedness of Christ's people between death and resurrection, we find that this latter event is thus spoken of as its consummation. "When," says the apostle, "when Christ, which is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory." "He will come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired of all them that believe." "We look for the Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change the body of our humiliation that it may be fashioned like unto the body of His exaltation." "The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the arch-

angel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall arise." "The dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." It is this event which puts an end to the sleep, even of the body; which rolls away the stone from every sepulchre; opens the mouth of every grave; fills every cemetery with a living population; summons alike the earth and the sea to give up their dead. It is this great event which puts an end, even to the semblance of death, which re-unites body and soul, and admits the whole man to a full participation of Christ in His heavenly kingdom. To this, therefore, we are pointed as the full consummation alike of Divine promise and of human blessedness. "When Christ, which is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory." "The dead in Christ first shall arise, and then we or those who are then alive shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we, the risen dead and the changed living, be with the Lord" forever. There will thus be a perfect reunion of the risen Saviour with His people, and of these His people with each other, — an end-

less re-union, which in its perfection and blessedness will more than compensate for any and every grief of previous separation.

Such, then, are the words, and the truths contained in them, with which we are told, under the pressure of earthly bereavement, to comfort one another. Let us bear in mind to whom it is that this language has reference. It is consolation to those who are living in Christ in regard to those who in Christ have fallen asleep. Let us see that we are thus in Christ by a living faith in Him and His work, and then with these words we may comfort one another. "Them which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him." They who fell asleep in calm assurance commending their souls to Him as a merciful Lord and Saviour; they who passed away in the overpowering weakness of disease, the slumber of unconsciousness, the wandering of the exhausted mind, not even knowing that they were in the dark valley, or that their trusted Lord was leading them through safely; they who departed doubting themselves, not doubting Him, confiding in His love and grace and power, and praying with dying breath against their own unbelief; and they who were taken by

Jesus Himself to the arms of His love before the trials of an evil world were encountered — the lambs of His fold, the like of whom even on earth is the kingdom of heaven, — in regard to all these may be appropriately employed the language of Divine consolation, "They are sleeping in Jesus; and when Jesus comes in His glory, God will bring them with Him."

And, if there be any wanting in such consolation, how suggestive this text as to the direction in which it must be sought. Be not, continue not, as those "that have no hope." We may, perhaps, live without the consolations of Christ's gospel while in health and prosperity, when all goes well with us, and the world around is smiling. Though even this is a poor substitute for that life of which we are capable. But how will it be when all in which we have trusted, and all that we have loved, is taken away from us, or we are about to be taken away from them? Do we not need something stronger and better than any of these things — than this world can afford? Can it be found, is it seriously offered, elsewhere than in the gospel of Christ? Here is our hope. It is a sufficient one, and it cannot disappoint. And we need place it before

us, as a refuge and stay to the soul in the day of calamity. Take hold upon this hope, and make it your own. Lean upon the Lord Jesus as a Saviour, as a sympathizing Friend, — the Restorer of the heart's lost treasures in a world of glory, — as able to sustain your spirit when those treasures by death are taken out of your sight. He is all-sufficient. His love is equal to His truth and power. And they are all alike pledged to the present and future welfare of His people. In that love and power and truth He says, "Come unto Me, all ye that are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." "Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out." Amen.

II.

THE WORD OF DIVINE CONSOLATION.

"*For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.*" — THESS. iv. 15-18.

IN our examination of the verses immediately preceding, we were especially occupied with what may be regarded as the central truth of the whole passage, — that in it which gives significance to all the rest, and under which they all range themselves in their proper position. That central truth is the announcement to the mourner in Christ, over those who, in Christ, have departed by death, that to these departed ones there is, and will be, life at the coming of Christ, the consummated life of a blessed resurrection.

Christ ever liveth. They that are really in union with Him, and united in Him, cannot die. Partakers of His nature, they are partakers of His life. "Because I live," is His own assurance, "ye live also." So long as remains this rock, the life of Christ, as the foundation, so long will remain the superstructure, His people's life, resting upon that foundation.

But while thus occupied with this great truth of life in Christ for all His people, this passage also brings to view certain particulars, connected with this truth, of the deepest interest and importance. The apostle, as we have seen, first tells his Thessalonian disciples that "them that sleep in Jesus, God will bring with Him." And he then tells them of the manner in which He will do this; of the endless re-union of the living and the dead following thereupon; of their common blessedness in the eternal presence and kingdom of their ascended and glorified Saviour and Master. That Master Himself shall bring about this result. The apostle, "by the word of that Master," gives them such assurance. This "Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and first the dead

in Christ shall arise: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds." Or, as he says elsewhere, "The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall arise, and we shall be changed. Then shall be brought to pass the saying, Death is swallowed up in victory."

To these momentous truths, let us endeavor to give our attention. These words of the apostle, it may be said, bring strange things to our ears. They are not indeed strange in the fact that we have not heard of them before. But they are so in their substance; in their relations to our own and to all previous human experience; to many in the fact that their meaning has never been fully appreciated. It is a very different matter, let us bear in mind, this of assenting to, or rather not positively denying, what others say or believe, and really believing it ourselves. It is a very different thing, this usage of words, which are to us doubly dead by repetition from childhood, and the clear understanding of those words in their life and power, — as winged and living forms of truth, — angels of power and of light sent down from the Source of power and of light to move upon the souls of

men, and to incite them to action. Many an one who supposes that he understands, and even believes, the language of this text, if his spirit were really aroused to see its meaning, would be revolutionized, transformed, and at once, as to his whole character, principles, and objects of existence. This, in fact, is the great difficulty at the present time with the ministry of gospel truth. It is not persecution or open opposition, a spirit of rampant infidelity, of positive dislike and repugnance. These to a certain extent, and in particular cases, are, of course, to be anticipated. But the great difficulty is one of another character, — a spirit of indifference. Sometimes it is the indifference of disregard, — sometimes that of dull, dead assent, — the drowsy and forgetful hearing, which retains nothing because it really takes in nothing, which hears and receives orthodox words and phrases without attaching to them any definite meaning. Against this kind of hearing, all need be on their guard. There is a living freshness in divine truth, which will ever reward our attention. Especially is this the case when such truth, like that of the text, has to do with our future and eternal condition. We are dying yet ever-living creatures. Here

are words from Heaven as to our state beyond this world, and that of Christ's people. They are words of comfort. We are told to comfort ourselves with them. What, let us ask, is their substance? What is the nature of this comfort which they administer? Are we in a state for its proper reception?

One of the first of these truths of which we are thus informed, is that of the continuance of a portion of our race, of some of Christ's people among the rest, alive until the day of His final coming. "We which are alive" when Christ comes, shall be caught up together with our friends now buried, who shall first rise from their sleep. "We shall not all sleep," is the accordant statement elsewhere. "We shall not all sleep" in death. Some will be found alive when Christ comes, to be glorified in His saints, and to pronounce judgment upon His enemies and opposers. "Christ will then come," in the language of the Creed, "to judge both the quick" — that is, the living — "and the dead." We shall not all sleep in death: many will be alive in the day of Christ's coming. A writer of this century has imagined the fact of a last man, — a lonely human being consciously surviving the wreck of

his race, and yet, in his loneliness and desolation, looking up to God, his Creator and Saviour, for the fulfilment of His promises of endless life and blessing. But such conception, however striking or beautiful as poetry, is not in accordance with these inspired declarations. The implications and the direct statements of Scripture frequently bring before us this fact of the text, that, when Christ comes, He will find a world of living inhabitants, — many of them, as in the days of Noah, not anticipating any thing of the kind; others waiting for it in earnest prayer and expectation. He thus comes, — men seeing Him come down from heaven, as His disciples saw Him go up into heaven, to raise the dead, and change the living, preparative to their final state of existence. "As often," says the apostle, "as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till He come." The Lord's Supper is thus a remembrance of Him and His work in His first coming. It is also a prophetic pledge of His second coming, — a prophecy which goes on repeating itself, and, like all prophecy, becoming brighter and clearer as to its meaning, until it melts away and is absorbed in the perfect light of actual

and blessed fulfilment; the Master coming, according to His own intimation, "to partake" with His disciples "of the fruit of the vine, new in the kingdom of God." "The last companies of those disciples shall be sitting, perchance, at His table; their hearts burning within them as the bleeding love of his first advent rises to their view, and longing for the daybreak of His second appearing. They scarce venture to hope that the time for the flight of the shadows has come. Yet, remembering those endeared words, 'As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till He come,' the question steals across them, What if it should be even now? Scarcely has the thought entered, when, lo, a strange sensation is felt by them all! The spirit of each glows and brightens as never it had done before. Each looks to his fellow as if to ask, What is this? It is the daystar arising in their hearts. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, their Lord is with them. It is Himself. He has come at last in the glory of His second appearing; and themselves, and the poor and earthly tables at which they sit, are transfigured into shining guests, and a table never to be drawn." "We shall not all sleep."

Some shall be alive at Christ's coming. But all, whether living or dead, shall be changed. "For this corruptible," with both, alike with the risen dead and the changed living, must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory." "The Lord Himself," on this great occasion, and to accomplish this work of perfected redemption, "shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and the trump of God."

And, with this revelation of the continuance of a portion of Christ's people alive until the time of His appearing, is connected another of no little interest, — the equality, the similar condition, of those who shall be raised from the dead with this class; the fact that in the resurrection, those who have died previously, and whose bodies have slumbered in their graves for centuries, and have been resolved to their original elements, — that these shall be restored, and be in a like condition with the changed living. "This we say unto you, by the word of the Lord," making the announcement emphatic, and giving it specific Divine authority, — "this we say unto

you, by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain shall not prevent" — go before, or have pre-eminence over — "them that are asleep." In bringing out this truth, the apostle corrected an error prevailing in the minds of some of those to whom he was writing. In so doing, however, he also provided for a natural infirmity of the human mind in all ages. It is comparatively easy to believe that one, who, like Enoch and Elijah, had never seen death, or that one, who, like our Lord, had ascended to heaven in bodily form, or that, like those who will be found living at His coming, — it is comparatively easy to believe, that such as these still living, may have experience of a bodily change, by which they are prepared for a heavenly existence. But the bodily resurrection of the dead, the coming to life again in the body of those whom we have seen die, the quickening and germination of those precious seeds with which our cemeteries and graveyards are so thickly sown, the literal giving up by the earth and sea of their dead, — how much more difficult is this to the natural understanding, to the natural capacity of believing reception! How even the renewed mind and heart faint and falter as it is

contemplated! What an offence to human philosophy! How easily demonstrated to be absurd by human science! How often has it been proved impossible in the analogies of the naturalist, disappeared under the knife of the anatomist, and evaporated in the laboratory of the chemist! And, just leaving out one thing, which these demonstrations always do leave out, — the truth of a living God, — leaving out this fact of a God, how perfectly absurd is this notion of life from the dead, — any affirmation that it will take place! But making allowance in our arguments for such truth, and how perfectly rational and easy is the inspired conclusion! Is it "a thing incredible that God" — not man nor angel — "that God should raise the dead?" that Omnipotence, to us an incomprehensible power, should exert itself in what to us is an incomprehensible way? Cannot He who gives life, restore it, — restore it in any one or all of its previous manifestations?

To meet this infirmity of the natural understanding, and even of the renewed mind and heart, and to enable man fully to take in and appreciate this truth of a resurrection, the doctrine is brought before us in this form, and with

these specifications. Those who shall not die at all, and those who have died ages and generations before, are put on the same footing. They are alike described as putting off the corruptible and the mortal, and putting on the incorruptible and the immortal. "We which are alive and remain shall not go before, have any pre-eminence of, them that are asleep." The same Almighty power which changes the living, will raise and transform the dead, — will prepare them both for their new state of heavenly existence.

But this truth is still more forcibly presented in view of that by which it is followed, — the order of events in the resurrection. "First, the dead in Christ shall arise, and then, after that," we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. The apostle does not here mean to teach that he, or any of those to whom he was writing, would live to witness the events of which he was speaking. The exact time of those events the coming of the Lord and its accompaniments, then were unknown, had not been revealed either to the apostles or their hearers. There seems to have been with these Thessalonian disciples,

as with others of the early believers, the impression that it was immediately at hand, and this to such a degree as to interfere with the performance of ordinary duty. The apostle, in the Epistle following, warns them of such impression as perhaps derived from his language, and they are told of certain things in view of which it was delayed. As, however, the time was unknown, and that of the continuance of causes of delay, they are told to be ever in a state of preparation. To the apostle himself as to them this time was not revealed. And, therefore, identifying himself with the Church in this its possibility, he speaks in the first person. His main object, indeed, seems to have been to impress upon them the spiritual nature of that kingdom and life to which in the service of Christ they were looking forward. This he secures by the distinct announcement that the resurrection of the dead precedes the full coming of this kingdom; that consequently it is in another state of existence, that Christ's highest promises receive their fulfilment. "I will come again," is the language of the Master, not to remain with you upon earth, "but to take you to Myself." "In My Father's house are many mansions which are

prepared for you." First the dead in Christ shall arise; and then with them and the living, shall all these assurances be verified. "We look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change the body of our humiliation," whether that body be mouldering in the grave, or living upon earth, "that it may be fashioned like unto His own glorious body." "As we have been planted in the likeness of His death, so shall we spring up in the likeness of His resurrection." Such resurrection and transformation precede the fulfilment of Christ's highest promises.

The nature of that fulfilment is revealed in what follows: "We shall be caught together with them in the air to meet the Lord." There is first the blessed union of Christ's people with Him, their blessed re-union with each other; this union and re-union in a sphere of being and of knowledge which includes joyful recognition. How it may be as to such recognition prior to the events here described, we are not so clearly informed. Though it would seem, from the parable of Dives and Lazarus, and from the vision of Isaiah of the fall of the king of Babylon, that such recognition may take place prior to the resurrection. When, moreover, the

apostle longed to "depart and to be with Christ," to be "absent from the body that he might be present with the Lord," his language naturally implies anticipated recognition of that Master, — as does that of the Master Himself to the dying malefactor. But whatever the extent of such implications, as to the interval between death and the resurrection, all is cleared up in the scriptural account of that event and what follows. Our Lord consoles His disciples with the assurance of their being with Him and with each other in the heavenly mansions. The very nature of this consolation which He administers, and of the blessed communion to which He points them, imply a continuance of the love and sympathy already existing. He prays, moreover, not only that the chosen twelve shall be in the enjoyment of these heavenly blessings, but that all of His people, and forever, be partakers of them. He speaks elsewhere even of those who are cast out, as seeing Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, suggesting the natural inference that those who would forever be companions of these patriarchs would see and recognize them also. In the text, again, the apostle holds up to those

who were mourners, the prospect of future re-union with their departed objects of affection. But what comfort or joy is there in a re-union, or in the prospect of a re-union, of which the parties shall be ignorant as it takes place, — a re-union in which there is no recognition? This would be to make and keep the promise to the ear while it was broken to the heart, — a thing which God never does. His fulfilments always go beyond our apprehension of them. These promises, moreover, have reference, not to disembodied spirits, but to those who in bodily form are transformed as living or raised from the dead; the corruptible putting on incorruption, the mortal putting on immortality, — incorruption and immortality of the whole man, bodily as well as spiritual.

We may therefore, without hesitation, take this promise in its fullest significance. Him whom, "not having seen, we love," we shall then see and know, — seeing Him as He is. And, shining in His image, like Him indeed, and yet still themselves, retaining those lineaments which we once loved on earth, shall we recognize those who left us weeping, or whom we left weeping, in this world of death and separation.

When Christ appears, "we shall see Him as He is," — shall know Him even as we are known. They that rise in His image shall know each other; shall recognize those in the Lord, who, associating with them on earth, have met again in heaven. The same sympathies which unite them here, will unite them there. They will be still serving the same Master, actuated by the same motive, — love to Him, and desire for His glory. And there in heaven, as here on earth, in communion with Him, and in the light of His loving approval, they receive their full reward, enjoy their highest blessedness.

But there is needed one thing more to make this matter complete and perfect; and that one thing is added, — the assurance that this blessedness is permanent, without end. "So shall we be with the Lord forever." So, thus united with Him, and His living members, redeemed by Him as heirs of glory, so shall we remain forever. It is, indeed, a blessed hope, this of being with our Lord, and of being re-united with those from whom, by death, we have been separated. It would be so if such re-union were but for a time. They who know the aching void of separation, have often felt, and given expression to

the feeling, that, for such privilege, enjoyed only for a few hours or a few moments, they would be willing to make any sacrifice, undergo any privation. Estimate, O aching heart, if you can, how such privilege would be enjoyed, with what price it would be secured! Only a few words, one more embrace, one opportunity of telling what even we ourselves did not know until they were gone, — how much and deeply we loved them! But when this was over, and it came to an end and the beloved object again vanished from sight and embrace, how bitter the grief of this new separation! How would every sad experience of the past be deepened and heightened as to its intensity! There is that in human nature, when it is fully awakened, which asks for permanence, — permanence in its highest phase of existence; which will not and can not be satisfied with any thing transitory and perishing. Any form of life, intellectual, moral, or social, which has an end, fails in meeting this high instinct of our common humanity. Peculiarly is this the case in the sphere of human affection. Man's heart is immortal. Its yearnings and cravings will hear of nothing temporal and limited. It feels its capacity of loving forever, refuses to think of its affec-

tions as ever terminating, except as by its own will, and at the expense of great grief and suffering. This instinct of immortality, — of the immortality of life, of being, and of love, — with which God Himself has endowed us, He has also in His gospel provided the means of satisfying. He does this by the revelation of a life of blessedness which has no ending. "We shall be with the Lord forever." We shall not only be raised, those who die, and be changed, those who live; we shall not only be caught up, together with these lost objects of our affection, to meet our common Master; we shall not only be admitted with them to those mansions in the Father's house prepared for our reception: something more God has created these hearts of ours to need, to yearn for, and to ask. And this object of our desires and aspirations He has provided. "We shall be ever with the Lord." Our union with Him, and our re-union with each other, are endless. We shall never again know the pang and agony of death and separation. Those words which are ever sounding in our ears on earth, those thoughts which our minds can never exclude, those emotions from which our hearts can never be entirely free, are banished

forever from heaven. "There shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, nor any more pain." The Lord Jesus Himself tells us that "the children of the resurrection shall not die any more;" that they that "believe in Him, though they die, yet shall they live;" and that, "thus living and believing in Him, they shall live forever."

This, then, is the message from Heaven to the Christian mourner at the graves of those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. "Wherefore," says the inspired apostle, having delivered this message, "wherefore with these words comfort yourselves." Is there not comfort in them? Does it not go beyond any and all that can be obtained elsewhere? Is there any other to be thought of in comparison with this? any that, in fact, deserves the name? The open grave closes the worldling's mouth; or, if he venture to speak, it is only to proclaim that he has no hope, — no real ground of hope or consolation. Forgetfulness, and absorption in trifles, is the world's remedy for a broken heart, for the bleeding wounds of bereaved affection, — those wounds again to be torn open with every new separation, to be plastered over again with the same miserable

remedy; the process to be repeated until that heart itself grows hopelessly cold, and is hopelessly buried in the grave of the worldling. What a life and what a death for an immortal being! And yet how many, with the blessings of the gospel before them, with this light from heaven shining all around them, and upon every step of their earthly journey, are living such life, and dying such death, in every hour of our world's continuance! It behoves us to recognize these things, — the possibilities of our own action and its consequences. Those who, through faith, are heirs of the divine promises, should rejoice in their privileges. Those who are still living only for this world should recognize its emptiness, cease to strive for, and absorb themselves in, its transient and unsatisfying objects. This is not our home. Here we cannot stay. Here those who are with us cannot stay. Why not place our treasures, and induce those who are with us to place theirs, where they cannot be lost or taken away? Why not lay them up in that heaven where they cannot be disturbed or diminished, — where they go on increasing forever? God Himself commands and urges us so to do. He presents the highest motives, the

most sacred and constraining considerations, as urging us to immediate and decided action. At the same time, the most terrific possibilities cluster around our neglect or indecision. Let us act while we may. We are now upon the field of action. Any moment future may sweep us aside from it, and forever. "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near." If ye thus "seek after Him, ye shall find Him, when ye seek for Him with all your heart." Finding Him, you find life, — life not only here, but in an endless and blessed hereafter. Amen.

III.

THE REST OF GOD'S PEOPLE.

"*There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.*" —HEB. iv. 9.

THE inspired writer is here speaking of that heavenly rest or sabbath reserved for God's people, which had been typified in the sabbath morning of creation, and subsequently by the Canaan rest or repose of Israel after the toilsome journeyings and trials of the wilderness of Sinai. Amidst the storm of persecution and trial to which these early believers and followers of a crucified Saviour were exposed, they are reminded of that rest which ever "remaineth to the people of God." They are exhorted to strive for its attainment, to guard against unbelief, unwatchfulness, or weariness in their Christian progress. "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God." "He that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from His. Let us labor therefore to enter into

that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief;" that is, the failure and example of the unbelieving Israelites who perished in the wilderness.

This figure under which the state of the glorified and blessed dead is here brought to our view, is that one perhaps, of all others presented in Scripture, which can, in our present earthly condition, be most fully appreciated. Our clearest views of a heavenly world, our most satisfying conceptions of its realities, are those that are negative. Even the pen of inspiration does not essay a full and positive description of the inheritance reserved for the faithful in the kingdom of God. It tells us what it is not. "It is incorruptible," without destructibility: "it fadeth not away forever." "There shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, nor any more pain." "There shall be no more sea." "There shall be no night there, and they need no candle, neither light of the sun." If it were lawful or possible for the positive realities of heaven to be put in words of human utterance, it would, even then, be impossible for the human mind and heart fully to take in their meaning. We sometimes endeavor to think of the height of bliss to

which the redeemed and glorified spirit is exalted, of those positive delights and joys and sources of blessing which are forevermore at the right hand of God; but all such efforts only convince us of our imperfection. The mind sinks back exhausted and dissatisfied. Its highest conceptions consist in the removal of what is imperfect, — that which interferes with earthly or heavenly happiness. Beyond these negative ideas of rest and peace, of release from pain and care and solicitude, we must rest, and wait for the teaching of heavenly experience. So far as they go, they are correct, — are sources of present strength and consolation; but, as is the case with all negatives, they give no adequate conception of the great reality.

And yet that conception so far as given is full of precious significance. To what it contains and implies, we may profitably direct our examination. The people of God, "the blessed company of God's faithful people," having accomplished their work here on earth, are thus spoken of as entering into their rest, literally, "on their sabbath-keeping." This is still further spoken of as God's rest, or sabbath, — God's rest as having been prepared by Him for His people;

God's rest, moreover, as in certain respects like that rest upon which He Himself entered after the work of creation. "He that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from His." Life, as a season of trial and probation, of duty and of effort, is one of toil and exertion, is one of weariness, a toilsome pilgrimage through an alien region to a heavenly home. When this season and pilgrimage are ended, the soul enters upon its rest, — a rest unbroken and eternal, — to know of no abatement nor diminution. "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord, for they rest from their labors." "He that hath entered into his rest, hath also ceased, hath ceased forever from his labors."

What, then, is meant when it is said of such an one, "He hath ceased from his labors, as God did from His"? In what respect is this rest of God, in the first sabbath morning of creation, similar to that eternal sabbath of the heavenly home, that rest in the heavenly kingdom to which the child of God is looking forward?

First, then, this form of expression implies the fact of cessation from labor. Herein consists the main point of resemblance between the rest of God in creation and the final rest of His re-

deemed people. "God saw every thing that He had made, and behold it was very good." "On the seventh day, God ended His work, and He rested" — that is, He ceased — "from all His work which He had made." Not that we are to suppose, from this language, that "the Lord," "the everlasting God," "the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth, or is capable of being wearied;" but mainly to give us the idea of cessation from the work of creating; of the approval and satisfaction with which that work was contemplated. The teeming week-days of creation had evolved light, order, and loveliness out of chaos, darkness, and desolation. In each successive stage of creative movement, the Divine Architect, well pleased, saw His work that it was good; "and on the seventh day, God ended His work, and He rested, ceased from all His work which He had made." The work of creation was brought to a close: that close was regarded with satisfaction.

And so, also, we may say of the servant of God, as he passes from the toil and strife of earthly life to that which is heavenly, as he is admitted within the gates of the heavenly Jerusalem, "He has ceased from his labors." Life's

work is done, and its result is satisfying. It may not, indeed, be the rest, the cessation, which follows weariness and exhaustion; of one fainting, and overcome by the toils and cares of his earthly pilgrimage. Like as the great leader of the hosts of Israel, who looked with dying glance from the mountains of Moab upon the plains and valleys of a terrestrial Canaan, and then with strength unabated, and eye undimmed, gazed upward to a still fairer inheritance celestial, so may it be, so sometimes is it, with the dying believer. It may be that his vigor is greater at the close than at any preceding period of his labors. Strong in that strength which all receive who trust in the Lord of hosts, he may have met and foiled the great Adversary in his most insidious approaches. It may be, in such case, the mere ceasing of the warrior, in all his strength and vigor, and in the very moment of victory. And yet, even in such case, the change will be felt as most grateful. The soul will have entered upon a rest and perfect peace, of which previously there could have been no conception, — a rest, in its first experience, and forever afterwards, giving rise to the purest delight and satisfaction. At our best

and highest estate, in this present world, we are made to feel that we are surrounded by opposing influences. We are living in opposition to a world of sin. And that world is living and acting in constant opposition to us, as engaged in the service of God. If we find ourselves resting in this world, we may well fear that there is deficiency somewhere, in spirit, or in the performance of duty. The servant and soldier of Christ must be ever casting off and aside the works of darkness; must ever be in the armor of light. This his armor cannot be laid aside, for he is amongst enemies. His loins must be girt about, and his weapons in place; for at any moment he may be assaulted by the legions of evil. Under the most favorable circumstances, therefore, the servant of God, who emerges from the warfare and toil of earthly life, into the pure and sinless atmosphere of that which is heavenly, will recognize that it is, indeed, a great and blissful change that has been accomplished. There is rest, — rest and peace which this earth cannot give, — not here, but hereafter, which remaineth for the people of God; of which God's people, as they are admitted to His presence, have the blessed experience.

Not less is this the case, with reference to the rest or deliverance, in this change, from opposing and distracting influences, not so much of a spiritual as of a temporal character. Apart from those labors or toils of the Christian which involve the element of temptation or enticement to sin, are those of earthly care and perplexity, the vicissitudes and sorrows, and troubles to a greater or less degree, of every earthly condition. With many of the children of men, and in reference to earthly experiences of this character, it may be said, that

> "Life is a torrid day,
> Parched by the wind and sun;
> And death the calm, cool eve,
> When the weary day is done."

"Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward;" and, of these troubles, the servant of God has his due portion. But, supposing this the smallest amount possible, what has been said is applicable to its removal, — the rest of release upon which the redeemed spirit enters, whenever these lightest possible of earthly trials and labors are ended. Life, in such case, may have been a scene of almost unclouded peace and prosperity. All the good things of this

world, with the smile of the Giver, may have been richly enjoyed. All of life's sweet, with the slightest possible dash of its bitter, may have filled the earthly cup. Want and care and pain, the anxiety of solicitude for others, the desolation and sinking of heart occasioned by bereavement or separation from beloved objects of affection, the sympathy of suffering through the misfortunes of those in whose welfare we are most deeply concerned, — all these may have been scarcely known, or of but slight experience. And yet, even this is not the cloudless sky of that eternal sabbath morning of rest which lies beyond. However clear the earthly atmosphere, however cloudless the earthly sky, there are always probable and possible clouds and storms below the horizon. No man knows, even in his day of highest earthly prosperity, what the next moment may bring forth. They, too, who know least of these things by experience, know much of them in the solicitude of anticipation. To pass merely from this region of probable change for the worse, to one of unending rest and assurance for the better, is a great and blessed change for an immortal being. The difference between this unbroken rest of heaven, and any and all

of these resting-places on earth, is that of the pilgrim and stranger by the roadside, and that same pilgrim at home, surrounded by, and delighting in, the scenes and associations of childhood, — his objects of permanent interest and satisfaction.

And, if such be the change and difference with these, how must it be with others, less favored, alike in their earthly and spiritual condition? If those, who, during their temporal probation, have enjoyed the greatest advantages, and have been placed under the most favorable circumstances both temporally and spiritually, find this rest so grateful and satisfying, how must it be with those whose earthly lot has been of an adverse character? How will it be with him whose temporal difficulties and troubles have abounded; who more than once, during his long and weary pilgrimage, has been forced to drink of the waters of Marah; whose soul has not only died within him under the heavy burden of privation and trouble and sorrow, but whose condition, spiritually, has been one of severe trial and danger, and almost overpowering temptation? If the victorious warrior, in all the flush and pride of undiminished vigor, looks back

thankfully and for the last time upon the field of his victories, looks forward with joy to his unending reward, how is it with him whose conflict with the enemy was more unequal, who, pressed, and hard beset, even to the last moment, with dying hand strikes down that enemy, and then himself falls exhausted, in the moment of victory, a fainting conqueror on the threshold of heaven! Who shall describe, or even in this world attempt to conceive, his emotions in the first consciousness of eternal safety, in his first entrance upon that sabbath which remaineth to the people of God, in his first reception of that peace which shall know of no diminution forever? He is at home, — in his Father's house; he shall "no more go out;" "he rests from his labors;" "his works follow him."

And as, in this great change, there is the rest of cessation, typified in the Divine rest from creation, so is there in it, and additionally, as in that Divine cessation, the rest of approval, of retrospective satisfaction. In the sabbath of creation, there was not simply a ceasing from work. The works were of such character that they were looked upon with satisfying approval. "On the seventh day God ended his work; and

God saw every thing that He had made, and, behold, it was very good." Thus also will it be in certain respects with the servant of God in his heavenly rest, in the blessedness of its experience. He will have ceased from his labors, will have entered upon his rest, — a rest full of joy and self-approval, as it looks back upon the past labor of life, in the service of a Heavenly Saviour and Benefactor. "A good man is satisfied from himself," as he goes on in his course, as he looks over that course, whether during his earthly journey, or after that journey has drawn to its close. Such is ever the sustaining and elevating influence of a good conscience, quickened by Divine grace, in our present state; much more in the light and assurance of a heavenly world. The redeemed spirit, informed and purified, will look back with grateful emotion upon the experiences and efforts of its earthly pilgrimage, — the act of earnest and faithful obedience; of self-denial for the benefit of others, or the advancement of the Master's work and kingdom; the prayer of faith finding its origin in a spirit of dependence upon Divine blessing; the deed of benevolence in love to Christ, and to those for whom Christ died; the resistance to

temptation, and of opposition to evil and sin; the sorrow of penitence in view of past failure, — all these, making up the labor and struggle and often agonizing conflict of the past, as over and forever ended, in their retrospect, will give rise to that peace that passeth all understanding. The whole of the Christian life will thus be recognized as the beginning of everlasting obedience, of endless perfection, of perfect blessedness. It will then be seen and understood that no earnest effort has been wasted, that no faithful prayer has gone unheard, no labor of love unrewarded, no struggle against evil and sin unnoted. As parts and portions of the work from which the spiritual laborer is resting, and which he contemplates, in the distant retrospect, they fill his rest with gratitude and thanksgiving. As labors for God and for the advancement of His glory, as dictated by the grace of His Spirit, they are seen to have been good, — such as can be remembered and thought of with the delight of satisfaction, of self-approval, with the assurance that they are approved and rewarded by Him in whose service they were rendered.

And, as in the rest of retrospection as to personal experience and self-approval, so will it be

in that of gratitude and thanksgiving in view of the Divine providence and grace and love running through all those experiences, and shaping them to their final conclusion. The care of a loving and providing Father will be seen as having been over His servant and child in all the events of his earthly pilgrimage. That redeemed soul will behold dangers averted, of which in their experience he was ignorant; temptations overcome, not in his own, but in Divine, strength; afflictions which he endeavored to escape, but which were needed for his safety and spiritual welfare. The happy junctures of events, here regarded as accidental, will there be recognized as interpositions of providential love and wisdom, — interpositions upon which depended the welfare of more than one immortal spirit, both for time and eternity. All will then be seen to have been working together for good to the servant of God, — to those who with humble and faithful hearts were engaged in the service of a heavenly Master. "He shall give His angels charge concerning thee." This fact, running parallel with the course of the past earthly history, will be fully recognized. The good hand of God over each step of that progress,

the Divine grace revealing itself in the work and love of an all-sufficient Saviour; bringing the soul to a knowledge of His salvation, and sustaining it in its heavenward course, — these, as recognized, will constitute material of heavenly gratitude and thanksgiving. It is not, let us remember, the mere consciousness of perfect safety, of full deliverance, which constitutes the blessedness of the rest of the redeemed and glorified soul. It is not merely the retrospect of past toils, trials, labors, temptations, and sufferings, never again to be encountered. But it is the grateful recognition of Divine goodness, the overwhelming gratitude of deliverance from the bondage of sin and evil, of Divine guidance and protection: this it is which gives harmony to the highest anthems of the redeemed, which forms the topic of heavenly ascription, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain," and who hath redeemed us to Himself, "to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and blessing." "He that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his labors, as God did from His." And the great element which constitutes the peculiar blessedness of that rest, is a deep and overpowering gratitude to that all-merciful Father and Saviour

and Benefactor, through whose work and grace that labor was rendered successful.

Included in this last point, and yet to be profitably borne in mind, is that of the abundant sources of gratitude in the eternal reality, as of consolation in present anticipation, coming through earthly experiences of sorrow, calamity, and bereavement. "No such chastisement for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby." Such is often the case before life terminates, but most fully and certainly in the heavenly explanation. Whatever the purpose of these afflictive dispensations, and however beneficial in their final results, the dispensations themselves to human nature are grievous. To accomplish their divinely intended purpose, it is necessary that they should be so. One part of the trial in many cases is, that it is not easy to see the special design of any such chastening dispensation, — why one, rather than others, should be selected or repeated. All that can be done, is to recognize from whom it comes, who is permitting, who is overruling; to say, "Even so, Father, for so to Thee it seemeth

good; and, seeming thus to Thee, it must to us be good, however dark, afflictive, or perplexing." What a revelation, as to every such experience, will come in a future world! What a flood of light will be thrown by them upon the soul's past history, — upon the history of that soul's welfare and salvation, — and how abundant the occasions of heavenly rejoicing in the retrospect of many of these sources of earthly affliction! The richest harvests of eternal bliss will be seen to have been watered with bitterest tears of temporal sorrow, the darkest and most threatening clouds to have been full of refreshing showers of divine mercy. He that went on his way through this world weeping, bearing precious seed, will come again in that heavenly world with joy, bearing his sheaves with him. He will rest from his labors, — those labors which involve the elements of suffering, privation, trial, and anxiety; and those labors themselves — ay, even those most trying to flesh and blood — will be seen, in their endurance, to have had their full share in securing this rest, — in heightening the bliss of its enjoyment.

And here, as we dwell upon these words, and think of this rest, let us remember for whom it

is said to be reserved, — the "people of God," — God's people, not only by creation and preservation, but by redemption; God's people, redeemed by His grace and love in Christ Jesus; God's people, as cordially accepting that grace, endeavoring to do His will, to place themselves at His disposal; endeavoring to do the will of God, endeavoring to become like God, and thus manifest the perfection of His character. To such as these, there remaineth an endless and blessed rest. Whatever the storms and tempests of time, there is a haven of peace to which they can look forward. With this hope as an anchor, the soul may ride through all these storms in safety; even while they are raging, may rejoice in hope of the glory of God. "The night is far spent, the day is at hand," — the night of toil and care and sorrow and anxiety, the day of heavenly rest and recompense. "Be thou faithful unto death," and He to whom that faithful service is rendered, will, in due time, "give thee a crown of life." Amen.

IV.

JESUS THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE.

"*I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die.*" — JOHN xi. 25, 26.

THE resurrection of Lazarus, with which, in our minds, this language is naturally associated, is one of the most remarkable of the various indications afforded, not only of the power of our blessed Lord, but of His Person; of His deep interest in human nature, His sympathy with human affection and feeling, especially as under the pressure of affliction and bereavement. Jesus, with the resources of Omnipotence at his disposal, weeps in sympathy with the weepers by whom He is surrounded. Jesus, with the burden of His own sorrow and suffering, and with His own open grave not far distant before Him, stands at the grave of another for purposes of help and consolation. In this, His self-forgetfulness, His self-forgetting sympathy, — forgetful

alike of His power as of His suffering, and thoroughly identified in the sorrow and suffering of others, — He manifests Himself as Jesus the Son of man, the "great High Priest, touched with a feeling of our infirmities;" while in the result of that sympathy He no less clearly manifests Himself as "Jesus the Son of God," divinely possessed of all power for deliverance and consolation.

In the light it is of such manifestations that we intelligently read or hear the language of this declaration, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he" — every one — "that believeth in Me." Spoken, it would appear, to a single individual, it is, as to its substance and in its reference, universal for all men and in all time. Whatever its meaning and application to Martha or to the disciples, the main substance of that meaning and application is to ourselves as to all to whom it is made known. We are called upon to endeavor to understand it, to make of it the proper improvement. If there be life and resurrection for men, they are here. If not here, they are nowhere. If He who speaks in this language cannot be trusted, then we are without trust and without hope: we are in a world of

hopeless delusion. Life is a round of vanity and emptiness, and death an eternal sleep, — it may be a frightful dream of hopeless misery. It behoves us to ascertain who it is that thus speaks, — what it is that He says to us, — the demand, in this His language, as in His person and character, upon our attention and confidence.

Giving our attention, therefore, first of all, to what is thus said, let us endeavor to see the meaning of this declaration. Our Lord here speaks of Himself as "the resurrection and the life." What kind of resurrection and life are thus spoken of and insured to men? In what manner, and upon what conditions, are they offered to our possession? What is involved in such possession? A glance at the passage, with its connection, will help us to see the reply to these inquiries.

Manifestly, then, we find in this language assurance of life of some kind or other, perpetuated beyond that of the present, beyond the conditions of our present earthly existence. The nature of this life is to be looked for in the language and actions preceding and following. It is sometimes difficult, in the declarations of our Lord, as to the life which He bestows

upon men, to decide whether He is speaking of one that is purely moral and spiritual going on in the present, or whether He is speaking of this same moral and spiritual life exalted and perpetuated in a higher state of existence. So, again, it may sometimes be a matter of question and of doubt whether He is speaking of a life purely spiritual and moral, present or future, or of one which includes bodily existence. No such doubt, however, need come up in connection with the language of this text. Its reference and meaning cannot be missed or misunderstood. The connection and the circumstances, the occasion of its utterance, the language and actions preceding and following, one of the appellations assumed, — all these make the reference to bodily as well as spiritual life; life restored to the whole man, bodily and spiritual, after bodily death has taken place, and this life of the whole man in a new state of endless continuance. The conversation was about Lazarus, who had died as to the body, — who was dead, as to the body, while this conversation was going on. It contemplates his restoration to bodily life; and it passes from him to others, and becomes of general application. "Jesus said, I am the resur-

rection, and the life," not to Lazarus only, but to him as one of many. What He was to this one, He proclaims, in substance, He is to all; to all men potentially, to all actually who respond to His offers. "Life and immortality" to man, restored life to the bodily man, perpetuated life to the spiritual man, is thus fully revealed and assured in this passage: "He that believeth in Me, though he die, yet shall he live; and he that liveth and believeth in Me shall not die forever."

But this assurance of a future life, of a future restored bodily life, is here conditioned upon the other kind of life already alluded to, — that which is moral and spiritual. He who speaks in this language proclaims Himself "the resurrection and the life," the restorer of bodily life, the perfecter of spiritual life in another world to those who, by faith in Him, have a spiritual life in the present. There is, indeed, a resurrection of condemnation to a very different class; but of those here mentioned, — participants of a blessed resurrection and a blessed life beyond, — the basis and the foundation of such life is a moral and spiritual life in the present. "He that believeth in Me, though he die, yet shall he live." He that thus believeth in Me, living through and

after bodily death, shall live forever. This life by faith in Christ, this new life "by faith in the Son of God," begins in the exercise of such faith, — itself constitutes the pledge and foretaste of its endless continuance. It "works by love," "purifies the heart," transforms the whole man in inward spirit, taste, affection, and aspiration, as in outward life, to the divine image of Him who is its object, — finds in Him as that object its sanctifying and transforming influence. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." There is a new creation, of changed relations, of changed principles, — of inward and outward life corresponding. The life which such an one lives, "he lives by faith in the Son of God." His life is "hid with Christ in God." "Christ liveth in him." When Christ by His Spirit, in the calling forth and the exercise of such faith, enters into the human spirit, and thus into the whole current of thought, feeling, affection, and action, then this new life has begun. However it may be as to the future, it is a present, living, actual possession. "He that believeth on the Son hath" — not shall have — "hath life."

But while this is all true as to life in the present, the language of the text contemplates it more pre-

dominantly in another aspect, — as to the future, — the endless future. "Though such an one die" as to the body, "he shall live," — live again in the body, live in the spirit, and, thus living in body and spirit, live forever. This restored bodily life, this perpetuated spiritual life, and continuation of that of the present, is thus perpetuated endlessly. Those thus living "shall not die forever." In other words, the great question of human hope, of human fear, and of human love, is here boldly, clearly, and distinctly answered. Man is an immortal being. "God created him in the image of His own eternity." Sin and its consequence, death, have come in and disturbed this original divine arrangement of man's being and blessedness. They are, however, only a disturbance, — are not hopelessly destructive. Divinely remedial influences and agencies have come in for purposes of restoration, for the removal of sin and its consequences. "Sin is the sting of death," the deadly weapon through which death does his work, and has his power; but this weapon has been taken out of his hand. "The strength of sin is the law;" but the law has been divinely vindicated, its claims have been satisfied. Its demands have been

met in the Person and work of a divine human Mediator and Vindicator, — one who, identifying Himself with man in his sin and its penalty, identifies man with Him in His triumph over sin and death and all their consequences. The sting of death has been thus taken away; and death itself, in divine assurance, as in actual human experience, shall be finally and fully abolished. "Through death," He who proclaims Himself the resurrection and the life, through His own death of atoning sacrifice and suffering, "He destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the Devil," — the first great murderer of men's souls and bodies, — "and thus delivered them who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage." "I am come," is His own language, "that My sheep" — My people — "might have life, and that they might have it in exceeding abundance." "I am He that liveth, and was dead, and hold the keys of hell and of death." "He died and rose again, and lives, that He may be Lord both of the dead and of the living." "I," said He, "am the living bread that came down from heaven. If any man eat of that bread, he shall live forever." "I know My sheep, and I give unto them eternal life," — life in the fullest

sense of that word possible to human possession and enjoyment. Thus, in union with Him, they "die no more" forever, they "have eternal life."

Now, it is of course impossible, in our present state, with our present limitations of knowledge, of experience, and even of capacity, to have or form any thing like an adequate conception of what is meant in these divine declarations. And yet our knowledge, while imperfect and partial, so far as it goes, may be real. "We know," it may be, only "in part," but part we do know. Certain realities may be comprehended, and in these we have intimations of others higher and better. In the light and blessedness of that heavenly life, for instance, — and this we can even now understand, — sin does not enter. Its disturbing and deranging and anguish-producing influence and power are entirely removed. "There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary are at rest." "There shall in no wise enter in any thing that defileth, or maketh an abomination." Human sorrow and trouble, and their mournful termination and aggravation, death and bereavement, are banished forever. "There shall be no more death, neither crying nor sorrow, nor any more pain." So, too, as to

those moral and spiritual evils of which, through sin, men are in the experience, — the bitterness of remorse and self-condemnation, the deep dissatisfaction of moral failure and delinquency, the instinctive fearful looking forward of the spirit to the results of its own action. All these evils, to a greater or less degree never entirely absent from any view of human life in this our present world, in that eternal life, in that new world, "the new heavens and the new earth wherein dwell righteousness," are banished forever; and, in their stead, the heavenly love and all its positive blessings, the heavenly powers and activities with all their capacities of expansion and development, — the positive in the eternal life, in regard to which our conceptions are so inadequate. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered the heart of man, the good things which God hath in store for them that love Him." "But God hath revealed them to us by His Spirit." Unknown, incomprehensible to the natural man, they are to the gracious man matter of personal revelation and experience. And as it is with the natural man, unable to understand or to receive a full revelation of the good things secured and enjoyed in a state of grace, so is it with the

gracious man as to the higher blessedness of a state of heavenly glory. "It doth not yet appear," it is not yet manifest, what we shall be; but in words, at least, it is comprehended, negatively and positively, when we say there is "no more death" forever, that they have "eternal life." Christ, "the resurrection and the life," gives His people this assurance. In "Him they shall never die." In Him, the life, they have eternal life.

But there is another truth implied in what has been said, as in other portions of the inspired Word, of deep interest and importance, — the nature of the transition from the life of the present to that of the coming world. There is the assurance, as we have seen, of life to the believer in Christ, even of his decaying and mortal body, — a blessed resurrection. There is a spiritual and moral life in the present upon which this resurrection depends, — "a life by faith in the Son of God," quickened into existence by His Spirit, and by that Spirit in His gifts and graces cherished and perfected; the earnest and assurance, not only of restored bodily life, but of its own endless continuance; the endless life of the whole man, body and spirit, in a world of heav-

enly glory. And this spiritual life, unlike that of the body, is perpetuated unbrokenly, without any such suspension, or break, as is involved in the earthly termination of bodily existence. The body dies. The spirit lives. As that living spirit departs from the dying body, it passes, not into a condition of blank unconsciousness, into a world where all things are unknown and unknowable. That spirit is with Christ, and Christ is with that spirit, in the moment of departure, as in all that follows. "Absent from the body, at home with the Lord." "I will come again," is His own assurance, "and take you unto Myself." Just as that Lord Himself passed from a cross of suffering to Paradise, and gave assurance to a fellow-sufferer that he also, on that same day, would be there with Him, so with all of His people in all ages, — dying as to the body, living as to the spirit; living with Christ in the joy of His recognized presence; the present spiritual life passing, without break or suspension, into the eternal life which He confers upon His people. This life is, indeed, heightened and elevated, attains its fullest capacity of exercise and blessed enjoyment, as it comes with Christ on the great day of His appearing, and in its final

experience of the "power of His resurrection;" but in the mean time, and all along, its life and blessedness are going on — in joyful preparation and anticipation for the great result to which it looks forward. Paul, for instance, looked forward in joyful expectation to "the crown of righteousness which was laid up for him," and which "the Lord, the Righteous Judge, would give him in the day of His final appearing." At the same time, and while looking to this final reward in the day of Christ's visible manifestation at the end of the world, Paul felt and expressed the desire to depart in bodily death at once, and be with Christ, and this as something "better" than was possible to mere earthly experience. Nor are these states of mind at all incompatible. The result of the one is a preparation for the other. Eternal life, heavenly life, even after the resurrection, will doubtless involve the element of advance and increase, in heavenly capacity and heavenly enjoyment. So eternal life, heavenly life, before the resurrection, between death and the resurrection, as in the present spiritual life, will have this same capacity of spiritual increase and elevation. "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. Yea, saith the Spirit: even now

they rest from their labors, and their works do follow them." Thus we are permitted to know and to feel in regard to those whom Christ, not death, has taken from our embrace. Thus, as believers in Christ, we are permitted to anticipate as to our own personal experience. Believing in Him, though we die, we live; living and believing in Him, we shall never die.

And all these particulars, as implied all along, but which it is important to bring forward explicitly, and look at distinctly, find their chief point of interest, their ultimate ground of assurance and certainty, in the word and character — the Person — of Him by whom this declaration is given. "Jesus said, I am the resurrection and the life." "Jesus said." Jesus Himself, upon the authority of His sacred character, of His truthful word, proclaims these truths of resurrection and life to man, — of life to the bodily man from the dead, victory over physical death with all its destructive accompaniments; of life to the spiritual man, in the present, in the future and eternal world, spiritual life untouched, unbroken, continuing through and beyond physical dissolution. And all this in Himself, — to which He is pledged. He does

not merely say, there is a resurrection and life, in all these respects to man, but, "I am this resurrection and life." They are in Me, flow out from Me, are in My power of bestowal. "I," said He elsewhere, "I am the bread of life," "the living bread which came down from heaven." "If any eat of this bread he shall live forever." "If any man thirst," is another of His declarations, "if any man thirst, let him come to Me and drink." "He that followeth Me," is another still, "shall have the light of life." The "eating" and "drinking" and "following" in these passages are equivalents, under different figures; and they are all used, as convertible terms, with that employed in the text,—"believing," "having faith," in Him, that faith which puts the soul in living connection with Him, and opens it to the enjoyment of His love and favor. "I am the resurrection and the life." He that believeth in Me, hath faith in Me, as Life-giver; in that faith becomes partaker in, and with Me, of such life, in its immediate reception, in its earnest and assurance, of all with which it is connected. Jesus Himself, the life, is to man the source of life. The man who, in faith, recognizes and receives Him as such, becomes

participant of such life in its present as in its future and endless blessings. He that thus believeth, shall live. Shall live? He lives already, in the very act and exercise of his faith; and, thus living, "he shall not die forever." Over that man, a living and believing soul, in the light of Christ's love, and under the shadow of Christ's protection, death has no power to harm or destroy.

It thus becomes the practical and paramount question, of personal interest to all, as they hear or read this declaration, whether the life and resurrection, thus revealed and offered to men, is something of which they have, not only knowledge, but actual possession. In "the first man," we have all died, and are dying. Have we lived, are we living, in "the second Man," — "Christ the Lord from heaven, the Author and Giver of life to dying men"? The reply to such question is not far to seek; in the light of Divine truth, has a very simple and easy solution. If we have faith in Christ, if thus, by faith, we are in communion with Him, in such faith and communion there is the assurance of life, — life itself has actually begun; and, with it, the eternal life, of which it is the earnest and the

anticipation. If we are prepared to take Him, "the resurrection and the life," at His own words, those words, in our experience, receive their abundant fulfilment. Believing in Him, though we die, we live. Thus believing and living in Him, we shall not die forever. Amen.

V.

JESUS THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE.

"*Jesus said, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and he that liveth and believeth in Me shall never die.*" — JOHN xi. 25, 26.

"JESUS CHRIST," said the apostle Paul, "brought life and immortality to light in the gospel. Of the truth of this, the text is an illustration. This will be recognized as part of our Lord's conversation with Martha, immediately preceding the miracle of recalling Lazarus to life from the dead; and it seems to have been intended to prepare her mind for its reception. "Master, if Thou hadst been here," was her mournful salutation, "my brother had not died." It was that sad moan of sorrowing affection, so often before, and so often since, repeated: if something had been done, or could have been done, that has not been, the result might have been different. "If Thou hadst been here!" There

may have been that, in the tone and manner, that indicated complaint; but there was, at the same time, an expression of confidence and affection. Martha believed that Jesus could and would have cured Lazarus, had He been present while life remained; that the same power which she had known to have been put forth to the benefit and relief of others, would have been exerted to his restoration. More than this, she seems, even in her grief and heaviness, not to have been entirely without hope. There was not, indeed, the same confident assurance. And yet, although her faith faltered when she thought of the four days dead, and the corruption and decay supervening, it could not, and would not, entirely give up its expectation. "I know that, even now, whatsoever Thou wilt ask of God, God will give Thee." Whether He would, or ought to, ask of God this inestimable boon, she does not presume to determine. But that the thing would be, if He would ask it, she was fully assured. "Thy brother shall rise again," was the reply. This was indefinite. It might mean all that Martha wished, or it might refer to a final resurrection, at the end of the world. It was taken in the latter sense, and, of course,

with a feeling of disappointment. "I know he will rise again, in the resurrection at the last day." But, until then! And the language of the text is the reply to this feeling: "I am the resurrection and the life." This prerogative of raising the dead, and giving them life, is peculiarly my own, to be exercised when and where I will. "He that believeth in Me, though he die," as Lazarus has died, "yet shall he live; and he that liveth and believeth in Me shall never die." And the Divine seal of attestation was put upon these words, to those who heard them, and to those who should hear or read in after-times, by the resurrection that followed. We read this language in the light of that resurrection. We look at that resurrection in the light of these wonderful words. And in each reflected from the other, we see a higher significance, — that they mutually confirm and sustain each other. Our Lord thus proclaims that He is the resurrection and the life. He authenticates this claim by the resurrection, and restoration to life, of Lazarus. He announces, moreover, in connection with it, that the whole transaction has in view the manifestation and proof of His own Divine commission. "I said it," — that is,

that God heard all His prayers, and this one in particular, — "because of the people which stand by, that they may believe that Thou hast sent Me."

But this declaration, thus of interest to those first hearing it, loses none of that interest in its repetition. Its truths are for all time, and for all men; and from all, they demand careful attention To these truths, thus presented, under special Divine attestation, let us endeavor to give our examination. What, let us inquire, is the substance of this declaration? How can we make of it practical improvement?

First, then, it may be seen, that there is here the clear and emphatic announcement, by our blessed Lord, of the truth of a future life; a life beyond that of the present; a life beyond the grave, continuing, after bodily death, in another state of existence, and thus continuing forever. He thus authenticates the existing belief of His day and people in regard to this subject. Martha had just given expression to that belief; and we know from other sources that it was the accepted faith of her people, as of their religious teachers. Our Lord puts the seal of His approval upon this existing belief.

He says, in substance, that it is true, and well founded. He also confirms it partially, in the miracle that follows; by similar miracles, elsewhere, as by His declarations and actions preceding and following. And He finally demonstrates it, as He does all His teaching, by His own resurrection and ascension, in bodily form, to heaven.

But this future life, the perpetuated existence of which He thus speaks, is described as twofold in its aspect and character. It is a "resurrection," a quickening and restoration of organic, bodily existence, as it was temporarily with Lazarus, with the daughter of Jairus, and with the son of the widow of Nain, as it was permanently with Himself, in the body of His resurrection and ascension. It is also not only a resurrection, but a life, a moral and spiritual life, upon which the resurrection depends; a new moral and spiritual life, coming into present existence, not suspended, not interrupted, by the incident of bodily death, but going on, and endlessly perpetuated. Life and immortality, bodily and spiritual, are thus here revealed and insured to man. There is a resurrection and a life; and they that partake of them, do so permanently. "They shall not die forever."

And yet this, deeply important and interesting as it is, is not the main point of interest in this passage. It is not the new truth of divine revelation which this passage contains — for those who first heard it, as for those coming after them. That new truth, thus revealed, is not the fact of a future life, either bodily or spiritual; for that, as we have seen, was already known. It is rather the source of such life of which we are here told, and, through this, its essential nature. "I am the resurrection and the life." "I at the last day will raise up every one that believeth in Me." There is, in the light of these declarations to man, sinful and mortal, and even after he has seen and tasted bodily death, life and resurrection. These are in Christ. As men come into connection with Him, this life passes over from Him to them, and becomes a living possession. "Because I live," is His own assurance, "ye live also." "Every one that seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, I will raise him up at the last day." "I know My sheep, and I give unto them eternal life."

This it is which constitutes the peculiarity of our Lord's teaching on this point, — first, that He is the Author, the Source, the Giver of life to

men, bodily and spiritual; secondly, that this life is communicated by Him to His believing people immediately, is, therefore, a present possession, the foretaste of one that is perfect and eternal. This divine life, which death cannot destroy, which death cannot touch, which is beyond and above all of death's agencies of dissolution and destruction to any man or any class of men, comes only from Christ, depends upon Him for its reception and enjoyment. All the promises of God in reference to this life find in Him their fulfilment. All the hopes of God's believing people, in all ages, "of a better country, even an heavenly," find their fruition in the exercise of His mighty power. Jesus is the resurrection and the life. This prerogative of raising the dead, and giving them life, is peculiarly His own, specially exercised in view of His atoning work, His redemptive deliverance from the penalty and power of sin. The deadly venom of the serpent, sin infused into the souls and bodies of men, produces death. The saving power of Christ, the great promised Deliverer of the seed of the woman, extracts this poison, crushes the head of the serpent, gains over him a complete victory, takes away the sting and power of

death, and, finally, death itself, giving eternal life to His believing people. It is not, therefore, merely, as we have seen, the assurance of a blessed immortality which is here given, but of this immortal life as derived from Christ, as coming from Him to man as an endless possession. It is thus insured to men, both upon His declaration and the pledged exercise of His power to its accomplishment. "Every one that seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, I will raise him up at the last day."

The truth thus presented, is frequently reiterated. Indeed, it is well worthy of note how often, and in how many different forms, it is exhibited in the teaching of our Lord and His apostles. And yet when we bear in mind what is manifestly the great controlling purpose of their instruction, it is not at all strange that such course should have been pursued. That controlling purpose is to present and exhibit Him, the Lord Jesus, the Son of man, the Son of God, as the great satisfying object of confidence and affection; to concentrate all human dependence, gratitude, and aspiration upon Him as a heavenly Saviour and Benefactor. In Him faith finds a full and satisfying object upon which it can rest

in perfect assurance. In Him love finds an object of love, and evidences of love which are perfectly satisfying. In His character and word and promise, hope finds the foretaste of its fruition, and looks forward to that fruition as perfected. "Christ is all," in all these respects, to the mind and heart of man, for time and for eternity. And we thus find that when this great truth of life from the dead is presented, it is as coming through and from Him. All the hopes and fears and anticipations of men connected with such life and its opposite are thus made to depend upon their connection with Him by a living faith, or their exclusion from Him by unbelief. "As the Father raiseth the dead, and quickeneth them, even so the Son quickeneth whom He will." "All that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God." "Christ shall change the body of our humiliation, that it may be fashioned like unto the body of His exaltation." "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." Christ is the life and the resurrection. "He is Lord, both of the dead and of the living." "He holds the keys of death and of hell." Life from the dead is with Him, is in His power of bestowal.

Thus as to the Author and Giver of the life spoken of in these passages. He does not, however, merely reveal Himself as thus the Source and Author of life to men. He tells further of the nature of this life, — what is involved in its possession. "I am come that My sheep," My people, "might have life, and that they might have it in exceeding abundance." "I give unto them eternal life." The life which He thus bestows, and upon which men enter in their union with Him, is perfect and eternal. Though they be dead, yet in Him they live. "As through sin, death abounds," so through Christ, life superabounds. However death may thus abound through sin, over against and counteractive through Christ, life superabounds. In this provision of divine grace and love, there is supply to every necessity. Every want and desire and aspiration of human nature is met and satisfied. The remedy is fully adequate to the disease, — wide-reaching, abundant, superabundant as to the evil for which it makes provision. Though man in sin dies, yet in Christ he lives. In every form and mode in which he thus dies, in every such form and mode comes the restorative life. Though, for instance, he be dead in

trespasses and sins; though, as the effect of this, he be also dead in the eye of the divine law; though he be dying and mortal as to his body; though, in all these respects, he be dead in sin naturally, — yet in Christ graciously he lives. As he comes into connection with Christ, such life begins. As he takes Christ in the appropriation of His person and offers and promises, the act of faith is itself a movement of life. As that faith finds exercise, there is, first of all, life under the divine law, — the life of pardon and acceptance. At the same moment, in point of fact and experience, the soul begins to live morally and spiritually, in the regeneration of its inward nature, — in the entrance and operation and control of new principles and affections. This new divine life, moral and spiritual, comes in and expels the old, natural, sinful life, and takes its place; and last of all, and included in this living connection with Christ and the two forms of life already mentioned, is another, — the restoration of bodily life, the removal of "the sting and power of death," the victory of the whole man, even of the mortal body, over the power of corruption. "He that believeth in the Son hath life" in possession or in assurance, in all

these respects. In the attainment of this life is "brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory."

And this life, thus divine as to its source, and perfect as to its nature, is permanent and abiding. It goes on in unbroken continuance from the present to the future world, and thus goes on forever. It begins, as we have seen, in the present, survives the transition of bodily death, is not by that event terminated or suspended. It was an invisible though real life "hidden with Christ in God," while the believer sojourned in his bodily tabernacle. It is no less real, though invisible, now that the bodily tabernacle has lost its tenant, — now that, for a brief period, the spirit has left its earthly habitation. Christ lives: these members of Christ live also. They are, indeed, out of our sight, but they are in the sight of Him who is their Adorable Head, — their life and crown and source of rejoicing. And even to human sight and human knowledge shall those members of Christ manifest themselves hereafter, not in the frail tent of the decaying mortal body of this earth, but "in a glorified body," — "a building of God, eternal in the heavens," "the body of our present hu-

miliation changed into the fashion of the body of Christ's glory," and fitted for the joy of Christ's presence in His heavenly kingdom, this perfected life of the whole man, to know of death no more forever. He Himself tells us that we shall be as He is, that we "shall not die any more," that "we shall be as the angels," that we shall have eternal life, — life in the fulness and blessedness of endless possession. As He, the living Head of His people, cannot die, so death to these people, His living members, is not possible.

Such, then, is the substance of this weighty declaration, —life, in Christ, to man, and this life of the whole man perfect and eternal. But these truths are here followed by another, with which they are in intimate connection, — the manner in which this life is attained, in which it becomes to man an actual possession. Christ is "the resurrection and the life," potentially to all, actually to His believing people. "He that believeth in Me," hath faith in My words, and because they are My words, "shall never die," "shall live forever." He is thus "the resurrection and the life" to the believing, the faithful. This is in accordance with the law of man's spiritual being: his attainment and en-

joyment of spiritual blessing is dependent upon his spiritual capacity for its reception. Faith is this receptive capacity. As a man has faith in other objects and things, so is he intellectually, morally, socially. As he has faith in Divine truth, and the Divine Revealer of such truth, so is he spiritually, religiously, in his ability fully to know such truth, and to enjoy its blessing. Our blessed Lord comes to us, as a Life-giver, with the question, in substance, which He addressed to Martha, "Believest thou this?" Believest thou My word, and Me? believest thou that word, that, "I am the resurrection and the life"? that, "I am the way, the truth, and the life?" that I am able, as I am ready, to save men from death, and confer upon them the blessing of life? Every thing, in the light of the New Testament, depends upon the proper reply to this question, Believest thou these things, believest thou Him by whom they are spoken? Martha believed, and received the blessing. Others, since then, have done likewise, and have had similar experience. Others are now believing and living; and others, again, are disbelieving, and in their disbelief are dead to God. But all this, however interesting or important, is not

now, and here, the specific point of inquiry. Believest *thou* this? Others may believe. But their belief cannot save you from death, or give you the blessing of life. Others may disbelieve. But their unbelief cannot excuse yours, may in fact be heightened by it, and increase its culpability. Believest thou thyself, upon the declaration of the Master Himself, a declaration divinely sustained by what followed, that He is the Lord of life, the only source of life to man? Do you thus believe? If thus believing, are you living in and for Him? When this faith in Christ really lives, then it will work itself out, in the Christ-like life and practice. Our assurance of endless and perfect life in Him is grounded in the truth that by faith we have life in Him already. The present spiritual life, hid with Christ in God, is not only a pledge and foretaste, but the actual beginning, of a life which has no ending. "To them that thus believe in Christ Jesus, there is no condemnation," there is already the beginning of eternal life.

But how if this question be answered in the negative? How if we do not believe? What then? We say in substance, that He who speaks in this declaration, does not speak the truth.

We say that He is not what He claims to be; is either a deceiver, or self-deceived. In saying this, we show our own moral and spiritual deficiency, our incapacity of appreciating His character. That is what unbelief in Jesus Christ means, — that it is which constitutes its moral delinquency. Belief and unbelief, faith and its opposite, upon which hang the blessings and curses of God's Word, are not states or conditions of the intellect merely. They depend, to a very great degree, upon that of the heart. It is not only true, that, as a man believes, so he is, but also, that, as a man is, so he believes. God blesses no man for the mere strength or clearness of an intellectual conviction. He curses no man for mere intellectual infirmity. But He does bless and curse men for the manner in which they get and hold their convictions; for the honesty or the dishonesty, for the earnestness or indifference, for the diligence or indolence, for the seriousness or frivolity, with which they treat certain subjects and their evidences, and through which they arrive at their opposite conclusions. Unbelief in Jesus Christ, so far from being an excuse for those who know of Him and His offers and claims, is spoken of

as constituting the peculiar enormity of their guilt, as manifesting, beyond every thing else, their depravity and perversion. When, therefore, in response to this demand of the Master, "Believest thou Me?" you urge your want of conviction, that Master Himself meets you with the explanation, "Ye will not," "ye are not willing to come to Me, that ye might have life." "How can ye believe," when you refuse to give My claims the earnest, serious, prayerful consideration which they always demand? The fault is not in the truth, or in its evidences. It is in the indifferent, careless, negligent, godless spirit in which that truth is looked at, — in which it is often put aside without any examination whatever. For this it is: "He that believeth not, is condemned already."

And it is in view of this our accountability for our faith, as for our conduct, that this language of the Master makes its claim upon our attention. Let us see to it, that His words are rightly received; that, to us, they are words of life, and not of death and condemnation. As He says to each one of us, "I am the resurrection and the life," "believest thou this?" may our heartfelt response be, "Lord, we believe: help

Thou our unbelief." "Lord, to whom can we go?" "Thou hast the words of eternal life." Thou art "the way, the truth, and the life." Lead us in this way. Teach us this truth. Give us this life. And to Thy name be all the glory, of Thine abundant grace, as of our salvation, both now and forever. Amen.

VI.

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THOSE WHO DIE IN THE LORD.

"*I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours: and their works do follow them.*" — REV. xiv. 13.

THIS Divine declaration, in addition to its intrinsic interest, is one connected in many minds and hearts with mournful yet tender and deeply endeared associations. It follows, in the burial service, immediately after the consignment of the body to its kindred dust, as the confident assurance, upon Divine authority, of the immediate blessedness of Christ's people. We are thus reminded, in the very words of inspiration, that this consignment is not final; that, through Christ, the gate of death is the entrance into life; that, in Him, there is the well-grounded hope of a blessed resurrection. It is the heavenly announcement of the release

of the wearied and sinking body from its sufferings and infirmities, — the deliverance and freedom of the spirit from sin and temptation, — the entrance of that redeemed spirit upon a holy and unbroken sabbath in the mansions of heavenly blessedness. "I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them."

Now, in looking at this language, there are two general features of it which claim attention. There is, first, the great central truth of the declaration, with certain of its particulars, — life to those who die in the Lord, — life to Christ's people, beyond that of the present, and insured to them upon Divine promise. Preliminary to this, is an announcement of the form and manner in which this declaration was given, the specific assurance of its truth and Divine authority, and the direction following as to its being placed in permanent form, for use and preservation. It was "a voice from heaven," not from the inspired man's inward consciousness or convictions; not a conclusion, reached through

reasoning, from natural principles, or even from previously revealed truths. "It was a voice from heaven," God speaking from behind the cloud of His majesty; in His Divine condescension speaking human words to human knowledge and apprehension; so speaking that there can be no honest mistake as to His meaning. Thus divinely spoken from heaven, it is divinely re-affirmed as to its truth and importance: "Yea, the Spirit saith." The blessed Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, of light, and of truth, bears His attesting and confirming evidence that this is a voice from heaven, and that it is a truthful message of blessing from heaven to men. This voice from heaven, the words of this voice, are to be placed upon record; to be so recorded that their exact meaning may be given and understood, — that they may remain to the Church, for permanent use and enjoyment. The voice said to me, "Write." It is to become part of Scripture; is too precious to be trusted to human memory, to traditional transmission. There is thus the heavenly voice, the Divine Spirit testifying and confirming, the divinely dictated writing, bringing to men in all subsequent ages the substance of that testimony, —

they that die in the Lord are blessed, — live in Him, — live in a state of heavenly existence.

But what, let us examine more particularly, are these words from heaven, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord;" "blessed are the dead"? This is sometimes the language of nature. But it is never unqualified. It is always that of doubtful alternative. The blessing, such as it is, is not in the death itself, but rather in its supposed deliverance from worse evils. Men sometimes choose death, — not for its own sake, but because life is intolerable; and one great evil is taken rather than another. But there is no blessing in that, — rather its opposite. The voice of nature as to death itself, — as to the dead, — is, that it is a great evil; that it is not a blessing; that they that die are not blessed. It is only the dictate of grace, — of nature enlightened and transformed, listening to the voice from heaven, that makes such affirmation. And it is in the light of the gospel of Christ that such affirmation receives its most precious significance. "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord." These dead in the Lord live again, as human reason has sometimes surmised, and as human affection has always tried to hope. They thus live,

and forever in a state of heavenly blessedness. Over that great enemy, which conquers every one of the sons of men, to those who are in the Lord, there is victory. They that believe in this Lord, that are in Him by a living faith and its fruit, a loving obedience, though dying and mortal, yet shall they live ; and thus living, and believing in Him, they shall not die forever. That mysterious change, at which nature shudders, and over which even grace cannot but weep ; that great disaster of mortality, which man regards as a curse, from which he is ever fleeing, and which it is his constant effort to avoid ; the grave, into which he looks with feelings of instinctive dread, — all these, to those who are in the Lord, lose their most repulsive features. Death has been robbed of his victory. His sting has been extracted. Christ has overcome death ; has brought to light life and immortality. He has, moreover, given such revelation, in His own work and person, of this life, in all its fulness and perfection and certainty, that there can be no reasonable question as to its existence and reality. Through Christ the dead live again. From Him they obtain the assurance of thus living. Blessed are the dead who die in the

Lord. Happy are the dead who die in the Lord. Blessedness is better than happiness, if they have to be separated. But in the highest form of blessedness, no such separation is possible. It includes happiness in the highest possible degree, and much more. Blessed and happy, therefore, are not only the living, but even the dead in the Lord. In those heavenly mansions, whither that Lord has gone before them, every want and aspiration of the undying soul is perfectly satisfied.

Such, then, is the substance, thus far, of this divine declaration, and the manner in which it makes its demand upon our confidence. There is deliverance from the worst evils of death; yea, in death there is blessing; and we know it upon Divine assurance, by a voice from heaven. There is a divine source of hope in this matter, — the word of divine truth, the satisfactory and well-grounded assurance, upon this word, of life from the dead. We may, indeed, imagine, in the calm moments of perfect health and untroubled reflection, when neither bodily pain nor mental anguish is exerting its influence, that this truth of man's immortality can be established upon other grounds,

— those, say, of natural reason or analogical inference. Good men have always thus hoped, and bad men thus feared. There are natural intimations upon which these hopes of the good, and fears of the bad, have not unreasonably rested. These natural intimations, voices of God in nature, deserve to be noted and considered, even by those who receive His inspired Word. If man were a creature of pure reason, sinless and unperverted, having a strong natural affinity for truth, and aversion from falsehood, these natural evidences of immortality would perhaps be amply sufficient; would constitute, alike to his reason and his faith, a moral demonstration. In reality, however, he is largely the creature of sense and of sight, of appetite and passion, of a depraved and sinful nature. While his higher interests are for the heavenly future, his lower are for the earthly present. Even as changed and transformed, under the renewing influence of divine truth and the Divine Spirit, he is still in a world of sight, — living, indeed, by faith, but needing for such faith, in the first instance, and then subsequently all along, evidence coming to every part of his nature. His bleared vision needs the

palpable miracle, the written word; his diseased hearing, the distinct and audible voice from heaven.

It is in the sound of that voice from heaven, in the light and clearness of this written Word, and at the door of that open sepulchre, where never man lay before, and where the body of the Son of man rested for a brief season, and then rose triumphantly, — it is only in the light of these revealed truths that the natural proofs and intimations of eternal life begin to be fully understood. It is only in this gospel of a risen Saviour that "the pleasing hope, the fond desire, the longing after immortality," is fully recognized as an intimation that He who created man capable of such desires and aspirations will not finally doom him to disappointment. It is only indeed in this light that the various analogies — physical, intellectual, and moral — of human life, of human progress in its different stages, the developing capacity to correspond, can be clearly seen as pointing to a still higher existence of capacity as of enjoyment. It is only in this same divine light that the great moral mystery of suffering righteousness and prosperous wickedness is not only solved, but becomes evidence of a future perfect

adjustment. These natural proofs of life beyond the grave, by themselves, are not sufficient. They are too impalpable to be kept distinctly before the mind of the philosophical few. And they have little or no value, are not capable of being seen or understood by the unphilosophical many, — the great majority. They often vanish and are forgotten, even when fully understood and appreciated, in the season when they are most needed, — when heart and flesh are failing under the assault of the last enemy. A dying man needs something more positive than a mere presumption. He would lean, in passing through the dark valley, upon something more stable than an analogical inference. He would be a fool, indeed, to disregard these, if he had nothing better. But, while giving them their full significance and weight, he needs something more. He needs, naturally, that which supernaturally has been given, — "the voice from heaven," the divine word of assurance that his hopes and fears as to a future life are not groundless; that the dead in Christ shall live; that, as He lives, His servants live also — live with Him in the blessing of heavenly existence.

And, as there is this revelation of blessing to

those who die in the Lord, so farther does it go on, and tell of the nature of that blessing. It is twofold. First, there is deliverance, release from suffering and anxiety and pressure, and perplexity of every kind; secondly, there is the positive blessing of self-approval, of joy, and of love following the life of holy obedience. "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord;" "they rest from their labors." Those to whom this language was first given, were in a condition, and surrounded by circumstances, in which the prospect of such rest and deliverance could be fully appreciated, — the anticipation of it was most grateful. It was a time of persecution and trial. The writer of the book was himself in exile, for the testimony of Jesus Christ. More than once in its progress, he speaks of the souls of those who had been slain for rendering like testimony. And immediately preceding the text, he speaks of a season of trial and persecution, which would require great endurance and faithfulness on the part of those exposed to it, to enable them to pass through it successfully. To men thus needing "to be faithful," literally "even unto death," and painfully conscious of the pressure under which they were living, and some

times dying, this language comes, of rest and consolation. The dead in Christ, whether they fall asleep in the course of nature, under the sword of the persecutor, or torn and mangled by wild beasts, at the stake, or in the flames, fall asleep into a blessed rest. However many or diverse the ways of reaching this goal, to all, as it is reached, it brings this blessed result. There is deliverance, — the rest of Divine and endless deliverance. "There remaineth a rest for the people of God." This is not so much to convey the idea of cessation from action, as of that from toil and painful care and anxiety, — relief from suffering. The labors from which those who die in the Lord rest forever, are those of trial and suffering and anguish, to which, upon this earth, they have been subjected. It is not a state of mental and moral stagnation, — of unconscious slumber, of unbroken quiescence and vacuity. It is one of blissful peace, of joyous expectation, — the grateful retrospect of past toils and labors, never again to be encountered; the joyous assurance, that, unlike every previous earthly season of repose, this shall nevermore be disturbed or broken. The dead in the Lord rest from their labors forever.

This by no means exhausts the inspired declaration of this passage. It is a truth, however, of the deepest interest to man in his present state, — that element, perhaps, of the heavenly blessedness which can here be most fully appreciated. The suffering of toil, and the toil of suffering, form part of the primeval curse. When that curse is removed, then one of its accompaniments and components will be removed with it. God's people have ever delighted to contemplate its experience. When Richard Hooker was near the time of his departure, a friend noticed that he was deeply engaged in contemplation, and not inclined to converse. And when the inquiry was made as to what was the subject of his thoughts, he replied that "he was meditating upon the number and nature of angels, and of their blessed obedience and order, without which peace could not be in heaven, and oh that it might be so on earth!" "I shall die," was the language of Robert Leighton, looking forward with the same feelings and the same hopes, — "I shall die and go to a more excellent country, where I shall be happy forever. I shall die no more, I shall sorrow no more, I shall be sick no

more; and, which is yet more considerable, I shall doubt no more; and, which is the chiefest of all, I shall sin no more." From all these fountains of present bitterness and future anguish, whether in actual experience or in anticipation, they who die in the Lord drink no more forever. To them there is an endless sabbath, — a full and perfect release from toil and anxiety. Whatever else, therefore, may be the blessedness of those who die in the Lord, this, at least, upon His own Word, spoken from heaven, may be anticipated, — rest, endless rest; peace, perfect peace — the peace of God passing all understanding, never to be broken, never to be interfered with or disturbed; to fill and satisfy and overflow the mind and heart forever. "Blessed are these dead who die in the Lord;" "they rest from their labors."

This, then, is one of the aspects under which the blessing which comes to those who die in the Lord is here exhibited, — a state of rest, of perfect peace; undisturbed by any foreboding of future change, disaster, or suffering; and unlike, in this respect, any thing in past or present earthly experience. There are many resting-places, — such as they are, — many seasons of

repose to the sons of men, during their earthly pilgrimage; but how soon and invariably are they followed by others of toil and care and sorrow and deprivation!

> "We trace
> The map of our own paths; and long ere years
> With their dull steps the brilliant lines efface,
> On sweeps the storm, and blots them out with tears."

Decay, mutability, and disaster are written upon all things temporal. The peaceful home of to-day is the abode of disturbance, anxiety, perhaps of strife, to-morrow. The unbroken and happy circle of one hour is found bereaved and weeping in the next. The brightest day on earth is succeeded by a night, — by reverse of some kind or other, involving bitterness in its experience, sinking of heart in its anticipation, sorrow in its remembrance. As the weekly sabbath is followed by the weekly care and toil, as the darkness of night follows the freshest morning and the brightest noon, so all these seasons of earthly rest are followed by their opposites, — often heighten and deepen these opposites, in the fact of their previous experience. He who would secure and enjoy unbroken rest, peace unalloyed by a single antici-

pation or foreboding of future evil, must look beyond this world, — must turn to that rest prepared for the people of God. "There shall be no night there, — no darkness of night following upon the high noon of that endless and heavenly sabbath, upon which the people of God have entered. Forever they rest from their labors."

But this is not all. "Their works do follow them." They receive those endless rewards which follow a life of grateful and loving obedience. These works, thus following, of faith, of love, of obedience, and thus rewarded, do not, indeed, secure salvation or acceptance, in the first instance, with God. Every truly renewed heart must and will feel and admit the utter unworthiness, the manifold imperfection, of all human work directed to that result. This is all of grace, appropriated in believing and loving reception. But while such is the truth, it does not at all interfere with another no less clearly exhibited in the Divine Word, — that every such work of faith, in heaven, as here on earth, receives its full and appropriate reward. "For them that love Him," and lovingly work and suffer for Him, "the Lord Himself hath prepared a crown of glory."

The more faithful and devoted to the service of that Lord, the more closely we tread in His footsteps, the closer will be our communion with Him in a heavenly world, — the higher service shall we there render, the richer will be its reward, the greater the capacity for its enjoyment. It is, indeed, all of grace, from the beginning to the end. Grace is the foundation, the scaffolding, the capstone. But it is grace dispensed by Divine Truth and Wisdom, — grace increased in its proper reception and improvement, grace giving rise, through this increase, to these richer rewards, and higher capacities for their reception. "One star differeth from another star in glory." There are different degrees of magnitude and splendor in the lights of the heavenly firmament. They all shine, and they only shine in the light of the Sun of righteousness. But it is just in proportion as they place and keep themselves in the fulness of the beams of His love and grace, that their own brightness continues and is increased. He who increased his one pound to ten, received ten cities. He who increased the same amount fivefold, received the fivefold reward. Grace bestowed the same amount, the one pound, in the first instance, to each. That same grace,

determined by perfect wisdom, allotted to each his reward. Heaven, the gift of grace, is, at the same time, the reward of gracious obedience and devotion. "The works of those who die in the Lord shall follow them." There will, consequently, in the life of future glory, as in that of present grace, be different degrees of reward and blessedness, as of capacity; the lowest far surpassing our present capacity of conception, the highest to be striven for, and earnestly desired. "Enoch walked with God for several centuries; and was not, for God took him." The dying thief passed from the cross, a dying penitent, to paradise. The glory of a heavenly world opened upon each of them. But it found them with very different degrees of capacity for its enjoyment. So, too, as to many other redeemed souls, dying in the Lord, resting from their labors, and passing into the joy of His presence. With different measures of capacity, with different degrees of faithfulness, they have wrought in His service. In different degrees they have made improvement. "Their works do follow them" into that heaven, whither, through Christ, they have entered. As is the service on earth, so is its blessed reward in

heaven. The most abundant shall receive its fullest recompense, the least not be forgotten. Not one effort for Christ shall be unnoted, not one labor for the welfare of man be unrewarded. Every struggle against sin, every tear of real penitence, every victory over temptation, every prayer and heavenly aspiration, is recorded in the book of God's approving remembrance. They are not wasted. They are not lost. In faith, as precious seed, they are sown. In heavenly fruition the harvest shall be fully gathered. In time these servants of God went forth weeping, bearing precious seed. In this eternal harvest, they come with joy, "bringing their precious sheaves with them."

But there is one thing more, in this divine message, to be noted and remembered, — the time of the soul's entrance upon its blessedness. "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth," "απαρτι," "from now;" blessed even now are the dead in Christ, and immediately, as they pass to Him from this world. "I will come again," is His own assurance to His sorrowing apostles, "and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there ye may be also." "To-day," is His consoling hope to the dying male-

factor, "to-day thou shalt be with Me in paradise." "Absent from the body, at home with the Lord," is the consoling thought of the apostle, as he contemplates the prospect of bodily dissolution. "Having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better," is his similar language on another occasion. "For me to live, is Christ; to die, is" — not, shall be in the long hereafter, but, "*is* gain." Even in the moment of departure, they who die in the Lord are blessed. That Lord comes to the spirit of His departing servant. Having sustained him in the conflicts and trials of his earthly life, He ushers him into life eternal; takes him to Himself, that where He is, there may His people be. He, the Protecting Shepherd and Lord, guides His people, even unto death. Those whom He thus guides unto death, He guides into life, — a life of blissful consciousness of His presence and loving favor. They who die in the Lord, rest from their labors, — not in a state of unconscious slumber; not in one of purgatorial expiation, — not where they can or will need make atonement for the sins or failures of the past, — not where they can be injured by the neglect, or be benefited by the efforts and prayers, of sinful

and imperfect survivors; not to a state or condition in which change — save elevation and increase of blessing — is possible. They are with Christ. Where Christ is, is heaven. To be with Christ, is to be in heaven. Whatever the difference between the condition of that redeemed spirit with Christ before the resurrection, and that same spirit with Christ after the resurrection, whatever the accession and increase of bliss, in this latter event, this, at least, we know, that it has entered into life, life unending, — into an inheritance of blessing unutterable and unalterable, — that rest and reward which remain forever for God's people. "Blessed, even now, are the dead who have died in the Lord."

Such, then, is the substance of this Divine declaration. This "voice from heaven" tells us that the dead in Christ are blessed. They are blessed in their release from all sin, and from all its consequences, — sorrow and suffering. They are blessed in the positive fruit and reward of all their works of love and self-sacrifice in the service of a heavenly Master. They are blessed immediately, — the endless life of rest and reward begins in their entrance upon a heavenly world. It is thus a voice of divine

consolation in regard to those who have died in the Lord, to those who, by such death, are in the sorrow of bereavement. It reminds us that these departed ones who have fallen asleep in Christ, have not perished; that "evermore" they are with Him, are enjoying that rest prepared for His people. Our losses, indeed, in these respects, and with all the consolations of divine grace and love, are inexpressibly heavy. They create a void which this world can never fill, which this world should not be allowed to fill, which can only be relieved by the balm of heavenly consolation. Let the heart, therefore, be tender still, — so it be the tenderness of resignation, and acquiescence in the purposes of divine love and wisdom; the tenderness which tearfully rejoices that the beloved object is blessed at the expense of our deprivation; which keeps itself fresh and green for the heightened blessedness of endless re-union. With these words, therefore, of divine consolation, spoken from heaven, we may sustain and strengthen our hearts in regard to those who have gone from us, in the Lord. "Jesus died, and rose again." "Them that sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him."

But these truths apply in another direction. They bring up the question as to one's personal participation of any such blessedness, or of the consolation following. Are we among those here described? Are we in the Lord? This, in the light of divine truth, is the moral and spiritual necessity of such blessing, whether now or hereafter. If we live in the Lord, we die in the Lord; and life and death alike are full of blessing. "Blessed is he whose iniquity is forgiven, and whose sin is covered." "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputeth no guile." Such an one is at all times blessed; for, under the smile of Divine approval, there can be no real disaster. No curse can live in the light and presence of God's blessing of love and favor.

And these our iniquities are forgiven, our sins covered, and the smile of Divine approval comes in only one way, — through Christ, as we are in Him, in trusting faith, in loving service. Thus, in Him we are blessed, living or dying. "There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." But it is only as we are thus in Him that we can cherish such assurance, that we can appropriate this consolation of the text, or, indeed, any of a similar character. "There is

none other name given under heaven, among men, whereby they can be saved."

"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord." Blessed are the living who live in the Lord; who, in due time, are re-united to those that have gone before, and are with them in the blessed re-union of heavenly existence. Is this the case with yourself? are these your prospects? If not, this voice from heaven does not speak comfort to your heart. That precious darling taken from your embrace, and, perhaps, in divine love saved from the influence of your sinful example, is safe in the arms of Christ. But you will never rejoice, meeting him there, if you continue in sin or earthliness. That revered parent or dear friend fell asleep in Jesus, and you felt that, with him, all was well. But that does not make all well with you, living in neglect and disregard of that Saviour. Here is our hope — of personal salvation and blessing — of blessed re-union with the departed objects of our affection. Make Him your hope, and all is well. You may then, upon the warrant of divine truth, upon assurances spoken from heaven, fill your mind and heart with thoughts and hopes of heaven. You may then think of

it, and look forward to it, as your proper home, as the blessed home of the family of God, where all His people and children shall be gathered and re-united, in love and blissful communion. "Goodness and mercy" thus following the soul "all the days" of its earthly life, prepares it "to dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Amen.

VII.

THE DIVINE TRAINING AND DISCIPLINE.

"*God dealeth with you as with sons.*" — HEB. xii. 7.

THE peculiar thought which gives significance to this passage, and which, indeed, as a thread of gold, runs through the whole Epistle in which it is found, is that of the headship of Christ in the heavenly family of Christian believers and brethren. Believers in Christ receive the privilege of adoption into this heavenly family, of which God is the reconciled and loving Father, Christ the divine, yet human, Elder Brother and Protector. At the same time, and in virtue of this same work of Christ, through which comes the adoption, they enjoy the influences of His spirit, — those blessed influences of the Spirit of God through which their minds and hearts are transformed to the image of Christ; and thus, with the privileges, they have also the spirit, of adoption; are children of God, not only in title and outward position, but in will,

in character, in inward disposition. "As many," says the apostle, "as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." The same Spirit "beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that with Him also we may be glorified."

The text thus brings to our view the present condition of the Christian believer. This may be thought of in contrast with his previous state, while in the service of sin and of this world. It may also be contrasted with that to which it looks forward in the future, — the blessedness and glory of a heavenly world. At the same time, it is of special interest mainly with reference to the present, — the experiences, the privileges, the trials of a present state of gracious probation. The mention of any one of these states is naturally a reminder of the others. We thus come, either directly or by implication, to the three great stages common to the personal experience and progress of every true child of God.

The first of these stages is that of nature, — of natural, or, more properly speaking, of unnatural, depravity; of alienation from God in the love and practice of sin; of condemnation, alike under the power and the penalty of sin; morally and spiritually dead in trespasses and sins, legally dead under the condemning sentence of the divine law. The second of these stages is that of grace, — grace abounding over sin and its consequences. This, while one of conflict, is essentially a stage of deliverance, — deliverance from the condemning sentence of the broken law, from the overmastering power of sinful habit and practice; a state of joyful pardon in the service of a reconciled Saviour and Benefactor. And this, again, is preparative to another and higher stage, — not, as in the first, of nature; not, as in the second, of grace, — unlike the first, rising far above the second, not nature, not grace, but glory; unbroken, blessed, and endless existence in the kingdom of God; nature transformed and elevated by grace to a state of heavenly exaltation. "By nature children of wrath." By grace children of God, accepted as members of His heavenly household. As children, heirs, — heirs to a state of

heavenly glory. "Heirs of God, joint heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, we may also be glorified together."

Now it is with the second and middle of these stages, that the text is occupied, — the regenerate spirit looking back in grateful recognition of the divine grace and mercy by which it was redeemed from the bondage of corruption, looking forward to the full and perfected redemption of the kingdom of God. Our deepest present interest, of course, is with this portion of the divine progress, occupied, as it is, with the experiences, the duties, and trials, of our present condition. These are brought before us in the text, as connected with a certain fact of our position, — that of heirship; heirship to a heavenly inheritance. We are "heirs of God, joint heirs with Christ." In view of this, our relation to Him, "God deals with us as sons." Involved in this truth are certain inferences of a deeply practical character, — inferences as to what ought to be our present feelings and expectations, our duties, and the obligations to their performance. To some of these let us now endeavor to give examination.

First, then, as implied in this relation of heir-

ship, is the fact of an inheritance, — the heavenly inheritance of a child of God. We are thus reminded of our permanent home and dwelling-place, as contrasted with our present state of temporary pilgrimage; where our permanent and highest interests are; and consequently, the state of mind with which objects, present and future, should be regarded. "If," says the apostle in another passage, "if, or since ye are risen with Christ, set your affections on things above." "Our conversation," says he elsewhere, "our citizenship, is in heaven." "They looked," said he, speaking of the Old-Testament saints, "they looked for a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God." "Now," says he, speaking of himself and his associates, "now have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come." In all these passages, we find the same great truth, — that the permanent and highest interests of the child of God are not yet in actual possession. They are beyond this present world, — while to some degree in actual possession, are still more largely in earnest and expectation. "God," in this matter, "dealeth with us as sons." Children of God, we are heirs of God, joint heirs with Christ to a heavenly

inheritance. There in that heavenly world, where is our permanent home and possession, are our highest interests. To these, therefore, the larger, the main portion of our thoughts and aspirations should be directed. We are living in the present. But we are not to be living for the present. There is much in this present that is inimical to our higher life, — to that state of mind and of heart which conduces to its perfection. Even those things of the present which are innocent and allowable, can be enjoyed only for a time; are so inferior and transitory, that they are not to be thought of in comparison. "I reckon," said the apostle, "that the sufferings of this present time," — and the same may be said of its joys, and objects of interest, — "that all these things of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." There in heaven are our treasures: there our hearts should be constantly going. That is our inheritance, as children of God by faith in Christ Jesus, — an inheritance blood-bought, — secured to us, by our Great Mediator, in the title-deeds of heaven. We hold it by right in Him; by constant reliance upon, and communion with, Him. He

would have us live in full view of its realities; to make it the constant object of our efforts, of our earnest desires and aspirations. "Set your affections on things above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God."

But this fact of Divine heirship implies something more than a feeling of interest in the inheritance, something more than a distinct perception of its existence and reality, — the going forth of desires to the attainment of its full possession. It involves, additionally, the necessity and the propriety of preparation, — that preparation which fits us, in capacity as in disposition, for its enjoyment. The heir to an earthly inheritance receives instruction and training, in childhood and youth, with reference to the peculiarities of his future position. So, too, is it with the heir of a heavenly inheritance. "God," in view of this truth of his heirship, "deals with him as a son;" treats him, as he really is, as a child, — gives him the instruction needed for his spiritual growth and development. There is need, to such an one, first of all, of instruction as to the realities of his present position; as to his present privileges and duties; the connection of these, in their enjoyment and perform-

ance, with his future prospects and experiences. His heirship places him in a new relation, not only to his heavenly Father and Saviour, but also to his fellow-men, — to his fellow-Christians, partakers of the same hope with himself; to his fellow-men, in possibility heirs to the same blessing. In these new relations are certain new and peculiar privileges. Connected with these are their corresponding obligations and duties; privileges and duties in reference to which thorough understanding is necessary. It is important that he should have this clear appreciation of these realities of the present and of the future, — the relations which spring out of them, the feelings and actions therewith properly connected. The heir of heaven is a learner, a child, in his state of pupilage. Such pupilage, as we have seen, implies Divine instruction.

But it also implies human acquisition, and demands, therefore, effort on the part of the pupil to use the means, and improve the divinely afforded instrumentalities. He thus, by learning to live upon earth, becomes fitted for heaven. The task of his pupilage is to be clearly ascertaining the peculiar features of his present and prospective condition; upon such knowl-

edge and appreciation, to be acquiring the dispositions and feelings, confirming the motives, strengthening the habits, forming and maturing the character, by which he is prepared for his heavenly inheritance. "We know not," indeed, in all respects, "what we shall be." In some respects, however, we do thus know, — have real knowledge as to our heavenly condition. "We know," moreover, "that when He shall appear," through whom, and with whom, we are joint heirs in the heavenly family, "we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is." And "every one that hath this hope in Him, purifieth himself, even as He is pure;" under the influence and power of this hope in Christ, of a heavenly inheritance, becomes fitted, in knowledge, in disposition, and in character, for its endless enjoyment.

Nor is it instruction, merely, that in such course of preparation is needed. With this, something else is necessary, — not only the impartation of truths and ideas, by which our minds are enlightened, and our souls purified for a state of heavenly glory, but the working of them in by test and trial, so that they become part of our personal experience. This, perhaps, might

be dispensed with in the case of unfallen and sinless beings; though even of this we are not certain. So far as we can see, some process of training and probationary discipline is needed, under all circumstances, to the formation of positive character; but whether so, or not, with other beings, it certainly is so with man, — with creatures like ourselves and in our circumstances. When we enter upon the divine life in the service of Christ, we are children, not only in knowledge, but in grace. We need that kind of experimental training which will both increase our knowledge, and reduce it to practice, — bring out of it experience. We shall thus be enabled to grow in grace as we grow in knowledge; as we throw off the remains of ignorance and delusion, throw off those of sin and corruption — become fully conformed to the image of our ascended Master. That there is a necessity for such spiritual progress, we should ever keep in mind, — ever keep before us as a definite point of exertion. But the point of special interest in this connection, is that of which we are reminded in the text, — not only nor mainly the human, but the Divine, agency and portion in all such progress; the

Divine arrangement for it, and interest in it; the Divine obligation assumed and pledged to further it in every manner possible. "If children, heirs, — heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ." And if such be really our relations to the heavenly Father, and to the First-born in the heavenly family, have we not in this the highest assurance of their agency and aid in our proper training and preparation for heaven? "God dealeth with you as with sons." What a flood of light does this throw upon the path of our earthly pilgrimage! What abundant sources of strength and consolation does it afford in our seasons of temptation, of difficulty, and perplexity! How it fringes with golden light the darkest cloud of earthly trouble, of suffering, of adversity! "God dealeth with us as with sons." First, by making us sons, — giving us the privileges, the title, the expectations, of sons; then by giving us, through His Spirit, the spirit, the will, the dispositions of sons; then, still further, by His providence co-operating with these influences of His Spirit and gifts, forming in us the character, the full capacity, the thorough preparation, of sons, — so arranging our whole earthly course, that it conduces to such

preparation, — to our thorough maturing, as children of God, for our heavenly inheritance.

And in how many different modes do we find this statement verified and illustrated! We, for example, are naturally disposed to walk by sight. But God would have us walk by faith. He therefore places us in positions, surrounds us by circumstances, brings upon us emergencies, where sight fails, — where faith alone can guide and sustain us. We, again, are naturally disposed to be laying up for ourselves treasures upon earth, idolizing those already in possession. But God would have us lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven, — often takes from us our earthly treasures, makes us feel their insufficiency and instability; sometimes takes from us our richest treasures, — those precious jewels of the heart, — lays them up in heaven for us; thus urges and gives us motives to strive for their recovery. We, again, are disposed to rest satisfied, and to be comfortable in our present blessings, — in earthly sources of enjoyment and of happiness; to be at ease in our lot, — adjusting ourselves to it, as if it were our permanent heritage and home, and not our place of temporary sojourning. God would have us feel that we are pil-

grims and strangers; that this is not our rest; that we are travelling to a better country, even a heavenly. And He makes us feel and understand it in the numberless shakings and dislocations and disturbances to which we are so frequently subjected. We, again, are often tempted, even after we have entered upon the service of God, to be satisfied with our attainments; to be at ease in Zion; to take favorable views of our spiritual condition, — and this even while, perhaps, our hearts are cold, and our lives unfruitful, in the work of the Master. God would reveal to us our insufficiency, — places us, or allows us to place ourselves, in some new position, where Satan is allowed to sift us as wheat; withdraws His special grace, leaving us to our own strength and wisdom, — or rather to our folly and weakness; in the revelation of such folly and weakness, and the fall connected with them, thoroughly humbles us, and stirs us up to greater exertion. These are some of the modes in which the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ — our Father in the Heavenly Family — proves and tries us, trains and disciplines, and prepares us for His presence in a world of glory. Thus it is that God deals with us as sons, — giving us

the position, the privilege, and the title of sons; gradually forming in us the character of sons; preparing for the full enjoyment of the inheritance of His dear children. "Heirs of God, joint heirs with Christ;" and, therefore, under heavenly instruction, training, and discipline, in preparation for the heavenly inheritance.

But all this, in the experience of the child of God, the heir of heaven, implies another thing, — one of which we are told as, naturally, to be anticipated, — chastisement, the training and discipline which involve the element of suffering. "What son is he whom the Father chasteneth not?" "If so be that we suffer with Christ, that with Him also we may be glorified." "Rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings." These sufferings of Christ came through His conflict with sin, — sin not in Himself, but in Satan and in the world around Him. The sufferings of Christ's people come in the same manner, and from the same sources, with the additional element of indwelling sin to render them necessary. "He," we are told, even in His sinless nature, "was perfected," exalted "through suffering." Nor can the same agency be dispensed with, in the process of perfecting

His people. It is while under this agency, in the reception of these purifying and perfecting experiences, that we need remember this truth of the Divine presence, and control and supervision of them. "God is dealing with us." In these our earthly trials and anxieties and sufferings and bereavements, "God is dealing with us," — not merely man, or Satan, or natural agency. Man, it may be, is dealing with us. So also is Satan and the world, and natural agencies and influences. But in and through and around and above them all, is the Divine presence and dealing. He is dealing with us, too, not as enemies or strangers, or servants only, but "as sons," — in His tenderness, as in the depth of His Fatherly interest, dealing with us faithfully, even though, in such faithfulness, He must deal sharply and severely. "Every branch in Me that bringeth forth fruit," My Father "pruneth, cutteth it in, that it may bring forth more fruit." "I know," said the Psalmist, "that Thy judgments are right." Even the earthly and the sinful are sometimes impelled to say as much as that: the righteousness of God's judgments is too manifest to be denied. But the child of God can go farther, and say more: "I know

that Thy judgments are right; and that, in very faithfulness," the faithfulness of fatherly interest and love, "Thou hast afflicted me." "I know," is the language of the Master, "I know My sheep, and am known of Mine." Just as the experienced shepherd, looking over his flock, and at a glance, without counting, knows whether any one is missing; so Christ, the Good Shepherd, that gave His life for the sheep, knows them, — knows of all their experiences, and makes provision for their welfare. "In all their affliction, He is afflicted, and the angel of His presence saves them." The chastisement which faithfulness sees to be necessary, it administers, but no more; and even that, with all the alleviations possible of Divine love and wisdom. "He stayeth His rough wind, in the day of His east wind;" in the severity of His chastisement, thinks upon mercy, has in view the welfare of its recipients.

These are the Divine meanings and purposes, in all the Divine dealings with the people of God, of affliction, trouble, bereavement, and earthly perplexity. These the child of God should ever bear in mind, in his reception of these dealings, — strive to secure the blessed

results to which they look forward. It is only as such spirit is cherished, and such improvement is sought, that we can fully join in the apostle's conclusion, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh out for us," is not merely followed by, but, under Divine superintendence and management, "*worketh out for us* a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

Such, then, are some of the truths implied in this statement, as connected with the present position and future prospects of the true Christian, the child of God, by faith in Christ Jesus. Let us, therefore, certify ourselves that this is our position; that these are our prospects; that this is the divine meaning of all our earthly experiences. And let us ever remember that these truths of the text are always true, — are just as true now, and with reference to the circumstances of the present moment, whatever they may be, as to any period of earthly existence, as to any form of human experience. Here and now, in every perplexity and trial, in the suffering of what has been and is, in the dread of what

may be, in every such experience, these precious truths of the text are still true; to the child of God are ever full of strength and consolation. If we are His, He is making, and will make, all events, toward and untoward alike, to work together to our highest welfare. When we confide our highest interests to Him, He will take care of them. If, "as heirs of God, joint heirs with Christ, we suffer with Him, with Him also we shall be glorified." In all these things, "the trials and anxieties and troubles of earthly existence, we may be more than conquerors, through Him that loved us." "The Lord God is a sun and shield, and He will give grace and glory; and no good thing will He withhold from them that love Him. O Lord God of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in Thee." Amen.

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